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MARY RAYMOND

AND

OTHER TALES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SCHULZE AND CO., POLAND STREET.

MARY RAYMOND,

AND

OTHER TALES.

BY

THE AUTHORESS OF

"MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS,"

&c. &c..

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1838.

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PREFACE.

An accidental resemblance between the leading tale of the following collection, and one recently published by the most original and striking author of the day, renders it necessary to state that the present work has been for two years past in the hands of the Publisher, and delayed by unavoidable causes.

Of the shorter Tales, a few have appeared anonymously in popular Miscellanies: and the indulgence of the reader is solicited for all, as in consequence of the absence from England of the writer, the proofs have not received correction from her hands.

C. F. Gore.

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MARY RAYMOND.

Oh! hushed be every thought that springs
From out the bitterness of things,
Her quiet is secure!
No thorns can pierce those tender feet,
Whose life was as the violet's sweet,
As spotless jasmine pure!

WORDSWORTH.

MARY RAYMOND.

CHAPTER I.

Get thee to church on Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face.
Speak not—reply not—do not answer me.
Romeo and Juliet.

WHAT strange eventful histories often lie condensed within the narrow compass of a couple of lines!

In one of the pages of Burke's Baronetage we read of the ancient family of Raymond of Warleigh or Warley Manor in the County of Dorset; and having disrespectfully skipped

over the creation, descent, and intermarriages thereof, arrive at one

"SIR CHARLES, 4th Baronet, *m.* Dorcas 2d. daughter of his uncle. Hugh Raymond, Esq. of Kelvedon Grange, (who died April 4, 1794) by whom he had

1. Charles William, fifth and present Bart.
2. Agnes d. an infant.
3. Sophia d. an infant.
4. George, b. 6 Jan. 1784; Lieut. in the 34th Regiment, m. June 10, 1805, Mary, 6th da. of the Rev. Richard Percy, (by whom, who d. in childbed, June 10, 1806, he left a posthumous da. born 6 June 1806) and was unfortunately drowned on the 3rd of February following, while embarking for Portugal.
5. John Thomas d. an infant.
6. Eleanor Jane, an infant.

Married at one-and-twenty to the daughter of a clergyman, the father of many—drowned a few months afterwards in the discharge of his military duties—and immediately followed to

the grave by the partner of his early choice! —Such indeed was the fate of the handsome and gallant George Raymond. But the noble tree thus untimely cut off, bequeathed a tender offset to the earth, around whose head the wind was doubtless tempered throughout the trying spring tide of her years by the care of his surviving family; for the "da. b. June 6, 1806," was consigned by her dying mother to the protection of "Sir Charles, 5th and present Bart." received into his house, adopted as his own, and, at the age of eighteen, ushered under his guardianship into the world of London.

Considerable success attended her first appearance. She was fair, mild, and prepossessing with just that touch of delicacy which, without degenerating into the sallow languours of ill-health, entitles an experienced chaperon to entreat the eager partner "will not persuade the dear girl to venture on another dance," or perhaps "to be very careful that her cloak is kept close," while daring the draughts of air in the ante-room at the

opera. Her voice was low, her step unprecipitate, her glance veiled by the shadow of her long dark eyelashes; there was, in short, something peculiarly feminine in her look and gesture which formed an attractive contrast to the more studied graces, and more robust activity, of the established beauties of the London season.

Sir Charles and Lady Raymond, the uncle and aunt by whom Mary had been educated and presented, possessed a numerous family of their own; an elder daughter already married, and three younger ones growing up to womanhood, besides sons of various dates and varying degrees of longitude. A sense of duty had determined Sir Charles, in the first instance, to become the guardian of his orphan niece; and a sense of duty continually reminded Lady Raymond that a girl possessed of no more than three thousand pounds must not be brought up with expensive habits, or ambitious pretensions. Mary accordingly ran little chance of being spoiled in Brook Street or at Warley

Manor; she was snubbed by the governess, slighted by her cousins, and sneered at by the upper servants; though pointed out by the Raymonds to strangers as "a very sweet girl, whom we regard as one of our own."

Pretty and pleasing as she was, it never occurred to Lady Raymond to feel jealous of Mary's attractions on account of her daughters. Mrs. Elwood, the eldest, was a brilliant, full-grown, full-blown beauty, a fine horsewoman, expert at billiards, loud, eager, and disputatious. The younger girls, formed on the same model, were tinged with the same high colouring; and Lady Raymond was too vain of the admiration they commanded, to fear the rivalship of the pale, calm, undemonstrative cousin, whose conversation consisted in laconic affirmation, who never advanced an opinion, or hazarded an avowal. She had formally acquainted her husband at the commencement of the season which followed Sophia's union with Captain Elwood, that Mary Raymond, being nearly eighteen, must

now, poor thing! be introduced; and Sir Charles formally acquainted her ladyship, in return, at the season's close, that he had received most advantageous proposals for the hand of his niece from Mr. Merstham, of Grosvenor Place, Secretary to the Board of ———

"Only think of Mary's luck!—Mary Raymond is going to be married, her very first season, to a man with four thousand a year!" was her Ladyship's exclamation on meeting her daughter Helena on her way to her niece's room, to communicate the intelligence. For it never occurred to her to doubt poor Mary's acceptance of such an offer;—a girl with three thousand pounds and no expectations, could have no right to reject a suitor capable of providing her with a good jointure and suitable home. Nor apparently did Lady Raymond miscalculate the views of her niece upon the subject; for Mary, after a private interview with her uncle, in which he expatiated strongly and peremptorily upon the eligibility of the match, begged he would ac-

quaint Mr. Merstham that she was willing to become his wife.

Even the governess by whom, as one of the bevy of Miss Raymonds, Mary had been trained into perfectness of perfection, applauded the faultless propriety with which she went through the trying preliminaries of matrimonial life; the acceptance of the strange suitor, the introduction to a strange family, the choice of wedding clothes, of wedding carriages,—all the embarrassments, in short, of the interesting affair. From the first portentous "yes," to the last mouthful of bride-cake, not a laugh was raised at her expense! Her young cousins—Charles and George—protested that Mary's was a dull, stupid wedding, not worth mentioning in comparison with that of Mrs. Elwood; and, after the ceremony, Mr. and Mrs. Merstham set off together in their new travelling chariot for Hastings, as tranquilly and demurely as if they had performed the same journey annually together for the last fifty years!

At the end of a month—the month—the

" honey-moon "— they returned with the same sober air of equanimity; but luckily not to excite a second time the scorn of the junior members of the family. The Raymonds had quitted town, and were settled at Warley Manor for eight months to come; while Merstham, holding an important appointment under government, was compelled to pass the autumn and winter in or near the metropolis. Mary had hoped indeed that it would prove *near*, and that during the first year of her marriage some charming villa at Roehampton, Beckenham, or Hendon, bright with hollyhocks and dahlias, and figuring annually in a water-coloured sketch through the windows of the Bond street house agents, would be hired for her recreation. But no sooner had Merstham explained that their own commodious mansion in Grosvenor Place was far preferable to the half-furnished gimcrack *rus in urbe* likely to fall to their share, that half his time must necessarily pass on the road, that he should arrive in the country to dinner at uncertain hours, tired and unconversable; and,

above all, that he had promised to obtain leave of absence from his office to enable her to pass the Christmas holidays at Warley Manor, than Mary coincided in his desire to remain in town.

Others, more accustomed to murmur, might perhaps have hazarded a remark on the dulness of London, and the cheerlessness of the season. But Mrs. Merstham received her husband every day with the same contented smile, the same assurance that she had divided her morning very pleasantly between books, work, and music; and the official man, whose life for the last twenty years had been a life or routine, considering her very fortunate to be able to pass her time in her comfortable drawing-room, forgot to congratulate himself on having so rational a wife. Little did he suspect that "poor Mrs. Merstham" was an object of heartfelt commiseration to the Elwoods, who were enjoying a bustling dissipated autumn at Weymouth; and to her cousins, Juliana and Helena, who were just beginning to be initiated into the tumultuous joys of all

the archery meetings and country balls within twenty miles of Warley Manor. He saw Mary sit silently beside her work-table, evening after evening, while he leisurely spelt over the *Courier* and the *Standard*,—occasionally varying her occupation by threading a needle, or snipping a bit of silk; and was satisfied that all the pleasures of life lay comprehended for his wife within that casket of satin wood, refulgent with cut steel and mother-of-pearl. He laid it down as a rule, that in the month of September, society is out of the question; and that the theatres, even if supportable in their decadence, were incompatible with the lateness of his office hours, which points being duly established, he hazarded no further remark on the subject of their imprisonment in London, unless a self-congratulation at finding his home of late so much embellished, and his time passing so cheerfully.

Merstham having attained his nine-and-thirtieth year,—for *him* the ideal of life had wholly disappeared. He had made his own way in the world; had fagged through twenty

years of office life to his present satisfactory eminence; and, moderate in abilities but steady in prudence, had conquered the regard of his superiors without incurring that perilous species of popularity, the partizanship of his colleagues. Merstham had never in his life been branded with the onerous title of "the best fellow in the world." He was simply considered "a very safe man," or, "very respectable man;" and, when at length the death of his father, a country physician, placing him in possession of five-and-twenty thousand pounds, enabled him to marry, his choice was determined towards Sir Charles Raymond's niece rather by the unassuming discretion of her deportment than the prettiness of her person. "The days were gone when beauty bright his heart's chain wove."—

His chief care now was that his mutton should not be over-roasted, nor his banker's accounts over drawn, nor his house in Grosvenor Place carelessly swept or untidily garnished. He wished his morrows to be as his yesterdays; the quarter days of his landlord and

tax-gatherer being duly balanced by those of that iron-fisted man, the cashier of his Majesty's treasury: and Mary Raymond was precisely the Eve he had dreamed of for his frozen Eden!

CHAPTER II.

Then tell me, is your soul entire ?
Does wisdom calmly hold her throne ?
Can you still question each desire
Bid this remain and that begone ?
No tear half-starting from your eye—
No kindling blush you know not why,
No stealing sigh nor stifled groan.

Akenside.

"WHO would ever have thought, my dear Mary, when I left you humdrumming at Warley eighteen months ago, that I should find you married on my return !"—cried Mrs. Merstham's cousin, Dick Raymond, a gallant mid, just arrived in his Majesty's frigate the

Spartan, from the India station. "What an unlucky dog I am!—I missed Sophy's wedding with Elwood by three weeks, and your's by—let me see, how long have you been spliced?—your's by—"

"Three months," interrupted Mary, without raising her eyes from her work-box.

"Three months—very true!—I got a letter from Juliana at Madeira, telling me all about the match; and begging me to break the news to Henry Marlay. But that I couldn't do, for we had left him at Ceylon, poor fellow, ill with one of the fevers of the country. However, I sent him word of it by the first lieutenant of the Asia, an old schoolfellow of his and mine, whom I met at Portsmouth just going aboard, by whom I'd no time to write."

"I do not know why Juliana should consider such a communication necessary," observed Mrs. Merstham, in her usual quiet voice, while a scarcely perceptible tinge of bloom coloured her cheek.

"Don't you?—yes, but you do though," said Richard, with an arch nod. "You know very well that Harry always intended, and that we all expected—"

"No matter now!" interrupted Mrs. Merstham, with a faint smile; "after a wedding, Richard, it is forbidden to recur to old times."

"Not always!—Sophy and Elwood came over from Weymouth when they saw the arrival of the Spartan in the ship news; and, during the week we spent together at the George, we talked of nothing but Warley, and the times when Elwood used to walk with her, philandering in the shrubberies; and—"

"Your sister's situation was a very different one from mine," said Mrs. Merstham; "and you will do me a favour, my dear cousin," (she glanced apprehensively towards the door as she spoke, for Merstham was finishing his after-dinner nap, and Richard had bolted in the midst of dessert to join his cousin in the drawing-room) "you will do me a *very*

great favour, by adverting no more to the past."

"*That* you may rely upon—*that* you may depend upon!"—cried the good-natured lad, in a somewhat louder key than seemed to suit his companion. "You know, Mary, I always loved you as well as any of my sisters —(I hope you got the cornelian necklace I sent you over from Ceylon?) and I would cut off my right hand, sooner than do any thing to vex you. Besides, 'tis all of very little consequence now; for Harry was given over before we sailed. Our doctor's mate, (one of the cleverest surgeons, by the bye, in the service,) said that a miracle couldn't save him."

"I met Lady Mary Marlay's carriage in Whitehall yesterday, with the servants in deep mourning," observed Mrs. Merstham in a low voice.

"Like enough. We were a month off Madeira, and a fortnight at Rio; the news of his death would be here six weeks before

us. Poor Harry !—there wasn't a finer fellow in—"

The drawing-room door opened, and, amid the creaking of Merstham's boots, as he traversed the room, Richard fancied he could distinguish the word "hush !" from the tremulous lips of the wife. At all events, he could not mistake the unquiet glance directed towards himself, as Merstham exclaimed,

"Mary, my love !—don't you give your cousin any tea this evening ?"

"I expected Martin would bring coffee."

"Oh ! but you must not make a stranger of Mr. Raymond. I wish to have the urn as usual. I am old fashioned enough to like the tea made in the room," said he, stirring the fire with the air of a master, and addressing the young sailor, who, not being addicted to the "cups that cheer but not inebriate," thought him, as he had done from their first interview, old-fashioned enough for any thing.

"To be sure my cousin had no fortune

or next to none," was the sailor's secret musing, as he returned that night to his bed at the Hummums. "Yet, I think my father and mother might have done better for her if they had waited, than by marrying her to that stupid, surly fellow. I suspect they were afraid my brother George was taking a fancy to my cousin. But what then ?—George would have had no chance with Mary against Harry Marlay!—Confound it, what stuff I am talking. If she could give up Harry, to marry this Merstham, she'd surely have done as much for George. Well! girls are queer fishes! —But I had a better opinion of Mary."

Richard called in Grosvenor Place at an early hour the following morning, to receive a packet he had promised to convey to Warley. Early as it was, Mrs. Merstham was down, dressed, and presiding over the breakfast table of the official man.

Her cousin fancied her more altered and paler than the night before; which did not prevent his announcing, on his arrival at home,

—that his cousin seemed very comfortably settled,—and that Mary was as pretty and good natured as ever.—Nor was any one at Warley sufficiently interested in the subject to inquire further. They were engrossed by Sir Charles's election for the neighbouring borough, and the brilliant prospects of Juliana, who at sweet seventeen was supposed to have captivated the affections of their noble neighbour, young Lord Glamorgan, of Glamorgan Castle.

Meanwhile, even Merstham, albeit the early hour at which he daily quitted home, and the candlelight hour at which he daily returned, prevented him from exercising any very careful scrutiny into the complexion of his wife, began to notice that she grew paler and more marble-like than ever. But there was nothing alarming in the increased delicacy of her complexion; and, finding her as cheerful as before, as willing to sit and work while he read the evening papers, and rise in a cheerless November morning, not with the

lark but the chimney-sweeper, to pour out his tea and hear him munch his dry toast, he entertained little anxiety respecting her health. Once, indeed, when his colleague, Mr. Thumbelton, the only one admitted as a dropper-in to his table,—a taciturn bachelor of fifty-five with habitual black gaiters and an habitual dry official cough, — observed, that "Mrs. M. did not seem quite so stout as she used to be?" the husband replied, looking at the sinumbra lamp, through his glass of port as he spoke, "My wife and I are going down to her uncle's at Warley for Christmas; and country cheer and Dorchester ale will bring her up again."

Mary smiled patiently at the allusion. She did not altogether fancy she should be the better for Warley, whether with or without Dorchester ale. Still, as Merstham had applied for leave of absence, and seemed to believe he could support the country air, in a house as well curtained and carpetted as his own, she did not dream of opposing his projects. The

post-horses were accordingly ordered, the imperial packed; and, after innumerable charges to the butler about locking the street door after dark, and to the housekeeper about getting all the chimnies swept during their absence, the husband of Mary Raymond handed her into the carriage, and away they went through the morning fog into Dorsetshire.

Now Merstham was a man altogether unhabituated to country-house life. Chained to his office, he fancied his arrival in the country must be a matter as important to other people as his departure from town to himself; and was surprised not to find the whole Raymond family assembled under the portico, or at least in the hall, to welcome him to Warley. Others were arriving on the same day, and he was disappointed at being only one of a large party. His first appearance at the dinner-table elicited no sort of comment; and, as General and Mrs. Meredyth had quitted London the same morning as Merstham, it was to his old

friend the General, a distinguished member of the lower house, that Sir Charles Raymond applied for political news and the rumours of the clubs. Merstham was not conscious how narrow political discussions appear in the mouth of a mere official man, or how vast and comprehensive, when expanding from the statesman-like mind of a man of talent. He saw not that his were the politics of red tape and tin boxes—of Downing Street and Whitehall—of majorities and minorities—and that of the state of the country or the temper of the continent he was as ignorant as a child.

After dinner, too, instead of the evening paper and a doze in his easy chair, he found himself condemned to music, écarté, and conversation, in a party comparatively strange to him. He was piqued and surprised to find himself of so little consequence; and to see his quiet Mary—his own particular wife—monopolized by her cousins; to listen to Mrs. Elwood's description of a gay

ball she had given to the regiment of lancers quartered at Weymouth, and give her opinion to Juliana and Helena respecting the costumes they were preparing for their private theatricals. She had now been so many months assimilated with himself and his habits, that he had forgotten the possibility of her assimilating better with those of her age and her own condition. But George Raymond her eldest cousin, Charles the young soldier, and Richard the mid, now crowded round her chair; and it occurred to Merstham, for the first time since his marriage, that there was a vast disproportion between his own still-life, solitary, drawing-rooms, and the populous vivacity of Warley. His deductions from the discovery were highly characteristic. "What noise, what confusion!" said he to himself, as he surveyed the gay assembly; "and what a relief to poor Mrs. Merstham to escape from it all, to the tranquillity of Grosvenor Place!" —an opinion confirmed a few hours afterwards by Mary's confession that "she should feel

right glad to be at home again." Harrassed by painful reminiscences, and alarmed by the raillery of her cousins, she had indeed reasons of her own for wishing the visit at an end.

Nor did the following morning tend to place Mr. Merstham more at ease. He was no sportsman; he neither hunted, coursed nor shot; and was too weak at billiards to venture on occupying the table in presence of several first-rate players. Sir Charles and his sons were absent doing the honours of the field to their guests; and the bewildered official man, whose occupation was,—like Othello's, —gone,—finding it the custom of the manor, as in the parish workhouses, for the two sexes to live apart during the toils of the morning, betook himself to a damp library, to wade through Sir Ralph Sadler's state papers till luncheon time; after which, he continued to attach himself to Mary's side for the remainder of the day,—her cousins shrugging up their shoulders at him for a bore, and Mrs. Mere-

dyth, one of the less familiar guests, hazarding an avowal of surprise to Lady Raymond, that so pretty a girl as Mary should have thrown herself away on such a man.

"I suppose," was her ladyship's equivocal reply, "that, like other girls, she wished to secure her independence by a home of her own."

"I fancy she has found her mistake by this time!" replied Mrs. Meredyth; whose attention had for some minutes been fixed upon Merstham and his wife, so as to discern from the agitated start and deadly paleness with which Mary attempted to silence some remark made by Helena Raymond, that her love for her husband was not of that perfect kind which "casteth out fear, because fear hath torment."

Yet the remark was simple enough. As they were approaching a garden-shed in the course of their walk, piled up with summer-benches, Windsor chairs, and other lumber, Miss Raymond merely exclaimed, "Ah! Mary! —do you recollect that famous sledge which

poor Harry Marlay made for us, the winter before last?—Do you remember his harnessing Dick's and Charles's ponies to it, and driving you over to Oakhampton?" Mrs. Merstham, instead of replying, laid her hand interdictingly on her cousin's arm, and turned towards her a countenance pale with horror and agitation.

That was the first time, by the way, her husband ever heard the name of Henry Marlay.

CHAPTER III.

Ainsi, prête à subir un joug qui vous opprime,
Vous n'allez à l'autel que comme une victime.
Et moi, tyran d'un cœur qui se refuse au mien
Même en vous possédant je ne vous devrai rien.
Hélas!—Est-ce là de quoi me satisfaire?
Faut-il que désormais, renonçant à vous plaire,
Je ne prétende plus qu'à vous tyranniser?

Mithridate.

A LARGE party in a country house is invariably described in novels as a superlatively pleasant thing; or, when talked over by two or three of its members when they meet elsewhere

at some future time, is adverted to as the delightful days we spent together at So and So Park. But pleasure is one of those susceptible and skittish goddesses who will not bear to be looked on, face to face; and, while the "delightful days" are passing, one usually overhears it whispered from guest to guest, that the present party is very inferior to that of the preceding Christmas;—that it is rather "heavy," or "flat," or "slow;"—that "it would have been quite a different thing if the Lapwings had come;" or perhaps that "no party in ———shire can go off well, without that amusing creature —— —— and that unluckily —— —— has been engaged elsewhere ever since Midsummer."

Still more *sotto voce* are the murmurings of the *élite!*—Lady A. has been "put into a room that smokes, and the housekeeper must have been aware that it smoked, from the colour of the muslin curtains which are dingy enough to be taken for family point!"—while Mrs. B.

is grievously offended at finding herself invited to meet Lady A. whose brother ran away with her sister.—Politics and country feuds combine to render three or four others uneasy in each other's company; the matrons vote the party too noisy,—the young people consider it too quiet.—The housekeeper is cross, the upper housemaid gives warning, the butler is muzzy, the footmen saucy; and, after the expenditure of much time, trouble, and money, the host and hostess have the satisfaction to learn that their party is said to have been "*manqué*," and to feel conscious that it was, after all, a poor imitation of their preceding holidays at the mansion of their neighbour the duke!

Warley Manor was, in these respects, no better than others of its stamp: with the exception that, from possessing three or four young Raymonds who were not dandies, it was somewhat less formal; while Juliana and Helena, new from the hands of the governess, did not at present aspire to be fine ladies.

The family was large, and the circle cordial. —Nevertheless, in spite of cheerful society, and Dorchester ale, Mrs. Merstham remained pale and thin; in spite of sparkling champagne, reserved and silent. Mrs. Elwood and her cousins having claimed her assistance in getting up a few *tableaux*, Mary, unaccustomed to resist, complied with a bad grace; and, as her husband continued to pass his mornings toiling through Sir Ralph's papers, she was able to give her aid at rehearsal without even defrauding him of the daily afternoon walk in which he exacted her company.

Nearly a week of the Mersthams' fortnight had expired; and, as it was settled that after the grand theatrical display Lady Raymond was about to give the neighbourhood, the less familiar guests were to quit Warley, Mary trusted that the final part of their sojourn might prove less disagreeable to her husband than its commencement. Already it had become a proverbial joke among the young

Raymonds, when they fancied her out of hearing, to refer on all occasions to " my house in Grosvenor Place,"—" my furniture in Grosvenor Place,"—" my habits in Grosvenor Place," —after the self-important phrase which incessantly betrayed poor Merstham's yearnings after home.

" That fellow never should have married,—he is cut out for a complete old bachelor!"—cried Captain Elwood to his wife, when, on the day of the theatricals and ball, Merstham's head was seen peeping and prying from the slips, as often as he could venture to confront the draughts of air invariably met with " on any stage."—" I never saw a man so full of ways, or so steeped in prejudices. Not an idea, beyond the pavement of London;—a sort of West-end cockney, far less amusing than the genuine cit of Cheapside. My dear Sophy, where could your father and mother pick him up?"—

" I scarcely remember. He fell in love with Mary at some dinner party, I fancy: was intro-

duced to the family, proposed for her, and was accepted."

"How could she persuade herself to marry such an automaton!"

"It was a very good match for my cousin. Besides, Mary is not like other people;—Mary herself is as cold as a stone."

"She has not your animation, my dear;—few women have. But really her rehearsal in the *tableau* of Mademoiselle de la Vallière at the foot of the cross at Chaillot, has given me a high notion of her sensibility."

"Nonsense!—mere acting!"

"But you saw what work Glamorgan made of *his* acting in the part of Louis XIV? He played the lover like a log, and the king like a stable boy! — *He*, I grant you, has neither grace nor feeling."

"You are always crying down Lord Glamorgan," cried Sophia pettishly; jealous perhaps of her husband's advocacy of Mrs. Merstham. "But everybody in the neighbourhood thinks Juliana a very lucky girl;

and, if he *is* a little boyish at present, his manners will soon be formed by the society his position in the world enables him to command."

"Nothing will ever polish Glamorgan; he has an intrinsically vulgar mind!"—observed Elwood,—"just as Merstham has an irremediably narrow one."

"Don't speak quite so loud, when you have any thing to say against Merstham,"—observed George Raymond, who had been a silent but interested auditor of Captain Elwood's tribute to the merits of his cousin.—"I am much mistaken if that mask of stupid selfishness do not conceal a sullen vindictive temper. I have watched him ever since he has been here; and would rather his sentence were for open war, than hear him so sternly civil to his wife, so studiously courteous to *us*. I don't like the looks of Mr. Merstham."

"He has not a good countenance, certainly," said Mrs. Elwood. "But there is nothing so deceptious as countenances; some

of the best I ever saw belonged to the least amiable people."

George Raymond, glancing from the fine open forehead of his brother-in-law to the pouting lip of his sister, perceived in a moment that Sophia was under the influence of a paroxysm of conjugal ill-humour, and talking *at* her husband. But between two frank warm-hearted young people indulging in occasional disagreements from mere wantonness, or the want of better employment, there is no need to make peace. He accordingly left Elwood and his wife to squabble it out, then kiss and be friends, while he devoted his more anxious attention to Mr. and Mrs. Merstham.

Strangely are the comedy and tragedy of life cast and intermingled!—Dinner came,—and George Raymond, watching the careful zeal with which Merstham measured out the soy, chili-vinegar, and cayenne into his fish-sauce, became convinced that the man's interest was self-concentered; and that his own studious neglect of Mary, lest her husband

should have happened to hear that Sir Charles and Lady Raymond had at one time been rendered uneasy by their eldest son's increasing attachment to his cousin, was superfluously conscientious. "He thinks of nothing but himself, his office, and his house in Grosvenor Place!" murmured George to himself. "Merstham is not moulded in the same volcanic earth which makes Elwood and Sophy keep up a war of words yonder across the dinner-table, because they must either love or hate each other to distraction." He resolved to repay himself for his previous reserve, by a cousinly confabulation with Mary on rejoining the ladies after dinner. But alas! on entering the drawing-rooms, George recollected that they were prepared for the ball, while the library was converted into a theatre. Mrs. Merstham, his sister, and Lady Raymond had already retired to costume themselves for the evening's amusements, and, long before their preparations were completed, —long before Glamorgan made his appearance

behind the scenes to be assured by his three future sisters and one mother-in-law, that his Louis Quatorze dress was the most "superb," "splendid," "magnificent," "beautiful," "elegant," "picturesque," and "classical," costume that ever taxed the shears of tailors, carriage after carriage entered the court-yard. They waited, in short, only the arrival of the Dowager Lady Glamorgan, the young lord's grandmother, to begin; and, in compliment to her ladyship, the Chaillot scene in which the young lord filled a principal part, was to be the first *tableau* represented. None but assistants were admitted on the stage; even the Raymond family, with the exception of those actually costumed, took their places among the spectators; and, at the wise suggestion of Sir Charles, Merstham stationed himself next the Dowager, his prosy measured articulation being peculiarly suited (she being somewhat of the dunniest) to her ladyship's aural capacities.

It happened, therefore, that cousin George

commanded a full and particular view of the countenance of Mary's husband, when the curtain drew up and the iron cross of the Chaillot grave-yard appeared. At its foot, veiled by her long flowing hair, kneeled the gentle Louise de la Vallière; her streaming eyes, her white hands clinging to the cross, her panting bosom and half-parted lips, attesting the tumult of feeling with which she repelled the efforts of the king,—the idol,—the seducer of her affections,—to detach her from that rock of security!—All eyes were riveted on Mary;—no one (except Juliana Raymond) noticed the costly brilliancy of the costume of Louis le Grand;—no one (except Captain Elwood) observed the graceful attitude of the reproving confidant, personated by the jealous Sophia. Exclamations of "How lovely!"—"How fair!"—"How affecting!"—"How impassioned," burst from the lips of every spectator present.

"*How impassioned!*"—Even the deaf Dowager seemed accessible to the forcible and

touching expression that gleamed through the tears of Louise de la Vallière! How much more, then, the man by her side,—the husband who felt that these tears, these sighs, this prodigality of emotion,—should have been evoked by himself — and himself only!—But was it indeed *his* Mary, his cold statue-like Mary, whose soul contained within its icy barriers so deep a mine of sensibility?—

While for a moment the doubt presented itself, as he sat transfixed, gazing upon the motionless *tableau* whose only show of life consisted in the sobs that burst uncontrollably from the bosom of one who was too perfect a woman to be a perfect actress,—Merstham himself was suddenly seen to betray emotions equally powerful.—Some sound appeared to reach his ear—some sight to meet his eye, unseen, unheard, by the rest of the assembly. Trembling with an agitation that seemed any thing but that of terror, he riveted his eyes upon his wife! Nor was Mary insensible to the influence of the same mysterious incident, for

a piercing shriek burst at that moment from the lips of Mrs. Merstham ;—and, relinquishing her hold, she fell cold and insensible at the foot of the cross !

CHAPTER IV.

D. Pedro. Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?

Claud. I have drunk poison whiles he uttered it!

Shakspeare.

As if in express contrast with the brilliancy and warmth of the illuminated mansion at Warley Manor, the night without was unusually blustering, unusually cheerless. Bitter blasts arose at intervals, accompanied by scuds of rain and sleet, which, melting as they fell, left a clammy chill upon the atmosphere. The ground was slippery, the air oppressive; and those who came from afar to the *fête*, might have heard the coachmen on the road grumbling over the plight of their horses, and the footmen over their own.

Yet, there was one pilgrim bound thither from a prodigious distance, who saw no cause for murmuring either in the length or cheerlessness of the way; one who was come from climes beyond the sea to claim the hand of her over whose heart he believed himself to possess a paramount influence.—Alas! how grievously to be undeceived!—Young Henry Marlay, son of a widow whose noble blood demanded the support of more extensive means than were ever likely to fall to her share,—had selected the profession of the navy as likely to relieve his mother at the earliest possible age from the charge of his maintenance. The boy was lucky during the war, when such a thing as luck might be made available; and the whole of his prize money was forced upon Lady Mary's acceptance. But those hard earned gains constituted the whole of Harry's little fortune; and, when at twenty years old he found himself appointed second lieutenant to the Spartan, a frigate about to sail for the India station, the world was all before him—to begin anew.

For Henry to have involved himself in even a remote project of matrimony under such circumstances, would have appeared absurd to others, sacrilegious to himself. He felt pledged in honour and duty to devote himself exclusively to his mother; and when, after frequent visits to the family of his friend Richard Raymond, both in London and at Warley Manor, he found himself desperately in love with Mary, he felt that it would be a violation of the trust of Sir Charles and Lady Raymond, to entangle the affections of their niece. He had a right, indeed, to love her, for Mary was almost as poor as himself; but he had no right to involve her in his unpromising destinies.

But, though he made no declaration of his feelings, Marlay believed them to be understood, and the motives of his forbearance appreciated. Four years of girl-and-boyish intimacy enabled him to understand and admire the mildness of Mary's character, and the prudence of her self-controul. "If she really loves me, she will remain single for my sake,"

ran the tenour of the sailor's meditations; "and prize me the more for not wishing to bind her by promises in the present precarious state of my fortunes." He had a right to suppose that she loved him; for not only did his friend Richard constantly assure him of her attachment, but George the elder brother who, though prevented by the family circumstances from all hope of making Mary his wife was avowedly attached to her,—could not disguise his jealousy of Henry Marlay.

To India, meanwhile, Henry was bound,—and to India he went. Three years was the appointed period of exile; but, the Spartan having been recalled from her station by government twelve months previously to the usual term, it unfortunately happened that in the height of his exultation at the prospect of seeing Mary again, he was attacked by one of the fevers of the country; and, at the sailing of his ship for England, was detained at Colombo. By him, however, the disappointment was unfelt. Marlay lay extended in the lethargic stupor usually succeeding high delirium, when his

friend Dick Raymond leant over him for the last time; and when, at the end of ten days, an unlooked for crisis restored him to himself, all was desolate,—the Spartan gone,—his messmates departed for Europe,—and the deep deep sea still intervening between himself and Mary Raymond!—

A transport was expected, however, to sail for England in the course of a few weeks; and Henry began to reconcile himself to his disappointment by the reflection that the life he prized for Mary's and his mother's sake, had been spared in contradiction to the predictions of his medical attendants; when letters arrived from England, calculated to increase a thousand fold his eagerness to set foot in his native country. The death of his paternal grandmother had suddenly raised him to independence! Passing by the rest of her family, she had constituted Henry Marlay her heir; satisfied from his previous conduct, as the will expressly stated, that he would deal honourably and dutifully by his mother.

Lady Mary now wrote to press the imme-

diate return of her son. "With an income of four thousand a year," said the letter, "you will of course quit your profession, and settle in life."

"To settle in life," stood, according to Harry's interpretation, for "you will become the husband of Mary Raymond;" and, on arriving after a five months' voyage in England, still enfeebled by the effects of his fever, still pale almost to ghastliness from disease, his mind was at once elevated and soothed by the hope of conferring competency on his beloved mother, and happiness on Mary. He now allowed himself for the first time to contemplate her position in the Raymond family. Satisfied that he could secure her a comfortable home, he permitted himself to see that she had hitherto occupied at Warley the humiliating place of a poor relation; that Sophia was envious of the preference of her brothers for her gentle cousin; and Sophia's lady-mother distracted by anxiety lest the heir of the family should forfeit his chance of augmenting its fortune and connexion, by throwing himself away

on her indigent niece. He remembered that Mary had often seemed unhappy; that her eyes were often red, and that her voice was tremulous. From all this he was about to relieve her! from all this humiliation she should be raised to honour, peace, and joy!—He would make her happier than ever wife was made before; he would offer all the compensation that devoted affection could supply, for the cares and privations of her youth!—

Lady Mary's welcome to her deserving son, meanwhile, was rendered deeply affecting by the terror with which she surveyed the ravages wrought by disease in his appearance. She wept over Henry again and again, while whispering that the prosperity awaiting him was the well-earned reward of his filial duty; and could scarcely reconcile herself to lose his company so soon, when after a single day devoted to business, he quitted town to proceed to Warley. Marlay had already ascertained at Sir Charles's house in town, that the family were entertaining a large party at the Manor; and had the happiness of learning from some ca-

sual acquaintance that they were "all well."—In reply to his careless inquiry, "any of the girls married, or likely to be?"—the answer, "Yes; Miss Raymond is married to a Captain Elwood of the dragoons; and they talk of Lord Glamorgan for the second girl," set his heart completely at ease.—The friend of the family had not, in fact, supposed it possible that such an inquiry could extend to the indigent niece!

Who now so happy as Harry!—The horses were ordered at daybreak to convey him to Warley. In the haste of a seaman's prodigality, he collected a few costly trifles to present as pledges of tenderness to her on whom so shortly all the pleasures of opulence were to be lavished. A few hours, and he should be once more on the spot which had witnessed the origin and progress of his boyish passion;—that passion which had grown with his growth, and now was all in all;—a few hours, and he should be again by Mary's side,—that Mary of whom he had dreamed in health, of whom he had raved in sickness;—whose image had formed his

protecting talisman amid hardship, danger, pain, disease, despair.

"I certainly am the happiest fellow in existence!" he cried aloud on his journey, as evening came on and he knew that the next change of horses would convey him to the Manor. "What have I done to deserve such a consummation — to be so incomparably fortunate! —People dare to talk of the cares and disappointments of life, and complain of the weariness of the world! But what a world it is!— How full of brightness and enjoyment for those who know how to improve the means confided to them;—for persons mutually attached, like Mary and myself, and, like ourselves, endowed with youth, and health, and competence!"— He clasped his hands for very self-gratulation, and could scarcely restrain the impulses of frantic joyousness bursting from his lips. "I must not go mad, if I can help it!" cried the young sailor, with a proud smile. "Yet faith! if any man could have an excuse for talking and acting like a madman, it would be myself this blessed night!"—

At length, as he approached the Manor, a long train of carriages and the illuminated windows of the house forewarned him that something unusual was going on. "Christmas festivities," thought he, "in honour of the large party assembled at Warley." Still he judged it better to inquire, on reaching the lodge, whether any unusual family occurrence were connected with the gaieties of the night. "Was it, in short, a wedding?"—

"No, no, Master Harry,"—replied the old woman to whom, half-jocosely, he addressed his question, and who well remembered the favourite guest of her young master, "they do say that Miss 'Lena, or Miss Raymond as is now, be soon to marry the young lord from Glamorgan Castle. But just now, they be only junketing and play acting up at the Manor."

Another few minutes, and Harry had entered the well known house, by a door leading to the offices;—again another few, and the venerable butler, with whom he was a favorite of old, conducted him towards the back of the

stage, where his young friends—the Raymonds —were assembled.

Unaware that a rumour of his death had reached England, preparation or announcement of his arrival seemed unnecessary; and, unconscious of the impression likely to be conveyed by the contrast between his still pallid face and the deep mourning habit in which he was attired, he stood calmly by the side-scene, till the conclusion of the *tableau* might enable him to accost the friends he loved so dearly. But prudence or self-restraint soon became out of the question. The object of his early love, purer, fairer, more etherial-looking than ever, was before him; and the exclamation of "Mary—my own dear, precious Mary!" burst from his lips, defying all power of repression.

In a moment, that well known voice reached the ears of Mrs. Merstham. Glancing towards the strange intruder, she beheld what appeared to be the spectre of him who lay buried in the sands of Ceylon,—uttered a

piercing-shriek,—and fell senseless to the floor. All became confusion. The audience, uncertain whether the agitation of *Louise de la Vallière* did not form part of the scenic display of the night, were left in perplexity by the sudden fall of the curtain; while the communication between the two rooms forming the stage and theatre being cut off, no inquiries could for a time be made.

A quarter of an hour elapsed before Mr. Merstham, by quitting the house at one door and entering it at another, contrived to make his way to the scene. Having, at length, persuaded them to unlock the library for his admittance, he found his wife lying pale and speechless on the sofa, with Sophy, Helena and Juliana bathing her temples. But nothing was there to excite suspicion. Richard Raymond and his brothers had disappeared from the stage; and Merstham listened with due politeness to Lady Raymond's explanation concerning the heat of the room,—and the nervousness of a first appearance before so extensive an audience. Had not George Raymond's eye

by chance been fixed upon Merstham's face at the moment of Harry Marlay's abrupt apostrophe and Mary's agonized recognition of her lover, so as to become positively certain from its change of expression that all had been heard and understood by the husband, no mortal being would have suspected that he discerned aught in the indisposition of his wife, beyond the causes her family chose to assign for the attack. A few hurried explanations, a few earnest entreaties, had induced Marlay to retire from a spot where his presence had created so much confusion.

"All is over for me here!"—was his reiterated exclamation, after having received from the Raymonds the intelligence of Mary's marriage. "All is over!—Why was my life spared?—Why did I ever return to England?" —and, at the suggestion of Sir Charles, the kind-hearted Richard readily consented to accompany his distracted friend to London, whither Marlay insisted on returning. So immediate indeed was their departure, that none but the members of the family had time

to become aware of any unusual arrival or occurrence.

On the morrow, all was as before. Had even the servants of the house been interrogated touching the visiters of the preceding night, two only could have replied with certainty — both of whom were cautioned to silence. No change was discernible in the family, unless that Mary's face was shadowed by a deeper sadness. But this was unobserved by the Raymonds; for, in the course of a few days, the official man was recalled to his duties in town.

CHAPTER V.

Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world
Will ever med'cine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday!

Othello.

WINTER is the moment for careful thoughts. It was no wonder, therefore, that such friends of the Raymond family as were induced to settle in town soon after the holidays, should find Mrs. Merstham less cheerful than formerly, her air listless, and her home gloomy. The much-vaunted house in Grosvenor Place was in fact just as uninviting as other London houses, during the season of abridged daylight and prolonged fogs; nor had Mary's

subdued smile sufficient power to illuminate its dull obscurity.

It was not that any one could have justly accused Mrs. Merstham of being more depressed in spirits than before the singular scene and grievous explanations, no reference to which had at present escaped her lips. She entertained a perfect consciousness of all that had passed on the stage at Warley Manor;—had distinctly seen the altered person of Henry Marlay, and heard both his self-upbraiding and upbraiding of herself. She knew that it was no illusion;—she knew that he who was supposed dead, had returned in the flesh,—rich, independent, faithful, exulting, to claim her as his bride;—that he had surmounted sickness, peril, and poverty;—that her own marriage vows to another formed, in short, the only obstacle to their happiness,—and shuddered with the knowledge! Her consolation lay in the hope that her cousins would in delicacy forbear all reference to the painful subject, and Henry all attempt at a renewal of their intimacy; and, above all, in

a belief that her husband was not likely to be rendered uneasy by a suspicion of what had passed. To forward this object, Mary laboured to appear as cheerful as she had ever been. The tears in her eyes were crushed,—the anguish in her bosom unacknowledged.

But in the mind and manners of her husband, a mighty revolution had taken place!—Instead of his former self-engrossed reserve, Merstham now affected a fondness for society, and insisted upon Mary's receiving company and mixing with the world. A forced, aimless, hilarity, — a tone of factitious pleasantry, an inquietude, an irritability,—plainly indicated that, instead of deriving enjoyment from his novel mode of life, it was a system he imposed upon himself for some especial purpose; – that there was something he wanted to discover,—some person he wanted to encounter,—some mystery he wanted to develop.—In society, at home, his eye was ever upon Mary, as if to scrutinize her most secret thoughts; but, no sooner did a third person intervene between them, than he affected a tone of play-

ful bantering; in order to disguise the want of tenderness of his address, he assumed an air of unmeaning jocularity.

Had any one been sufficiently interested in a man like Merstham to note the changes of his demeanour, this alteration might have been sensible to all. As it was, the subordinates in his office observed that, heretofore the most punctual and subservient of men, he was becoming absent in his manners, forgetful in his habits, and reckless in his tone. His servants discovered that he was "perplexed in the extreme," though "nothing wherefore;" the footman whispered to the butler that things must be going on wrong with master, for he had twice forgot to wind up his watch, and once left half-a-crown in his waistcoat pocket; and the butler decided in his turn that Mr. Merstham had probably heard rumours of a run against his banker, or a reduction of salary in his office. That any moral cause could operate against the peace of mind of such a person, seemed out of the question.

Unable to bestow our sympathy upon the

woes of unamiable persons, we accustom ourselves to *doubt* as well as disregard their existence. We allow the fox to be hunted to its end, and care not whether the snake be scotched or killed outright;—but—

> The poor beetle that we tread upon
> In corporal sufferance feels a pang as great
> As when a giant dies;

and an intensely selfish man is not likely to survey the wreck of his personal happiness with less concern than one who is less an egotist. Merstham had, in fact, been as grievously deceived, and was as great a sufferer, as a man of generous nature.—His whole life long had been devoted to the care of his own welfare! He had fenced round his domestic comforts by every means that human foresight could devise:—had secured a house that did not smoke, furniture of well-seasoned mahogany, a well-built carriage, and well-broken horses and servants. His property was insured,—his funds invested to yield him five per cent when the rest of the world discontented itself with three;—and, last

of all, with infinite searching and painstaking, he had appropriated to himself a wife likely to be as exclusively and submissively his own as his silver side-dishes or library-table;—a wife to nurse him, when gout or rheumatism should arise;—to do honour to his house on occasions of rare hospitality;—and to be the mother of children reflecting trait for trait his lineaments and character, and destined to perpetuate his name and inherit the household treasures on which he prided himself so dearly.

But what a change had overmastered the spirit of his dream!

The grateful, patient, passive wife,—the joint-stool — the porringer — the fretted garment intrinsically his own,—was, after all, a revolted spirit!—She might seem to submit to his authority; but her heart defied him — her *feelings* had escaped from durance! — Cold and reserved towards himself, her soul was bright with visions that he knew not of. While she smiled and submitted, he was doubtless an object of derision to her. His age, his person, his name, his house, his

habits, were secretly despised by the insignificant being who, as a piece of suitable domestic furniture, had been appropriated to his use!

Poor Merstham!—Like the Moor to whom "the gentle lady" Desdemona was disproportionately wedded, he felt himself hurled from supreme bliss—from bliss beyond his expectation and degree,—to all the degradation of his present misery. The middle-aged husband of a young and lovely wife;—the egotist who felt his sleep and appetite destroyed by her treachery;—the thrifty bachelor who, waiting long to wive, and chancing so auspiciously, found himself after all his cunning, only one of the ninety-and-nine whose hands plunged into a bag in search of a silver eel, bring forth a serpent;—how would his official colleagues exult over him! How would his country cousins, envious of the superior connexion he had formed, glory in the discovery that he had been made a cat's paw—a dupe—a victim.—A victim, however, he would never blindly be. His vigilance in the guardianship of his honour should be worthy of the object. He would watch over

his wife as never even Spanish wife had yet been watched;—would scrutinize, examine,—perhaps detect,—*perhaps, revenge!*—

At present, the utmost of his cunning had discovered nothing. Mr. Merstham's seemingly careless cross-examination of the servants availed not to point out a single individual visiting his house during his absence, who in the slightest degree resembled what he had seen of the mysterious vision of Warley; nor was there a clue by which to trace a step of Mary's leading to any dishonest purpose. But then he *knew* her to be a hypocrite!—Hypocrisy varies only in the more or the less; and who could determine to what extent she might still manage to deceive him?—

Meanwhile, undreaming of her husband's solicitude, regarding him with respect as the man whose disinterestedness had stooped to her poverty but appreciating him as the insensible being she had found him in their early wedlock, Mrs. Merstham sauntered along the brink of a volcanic crater without a suspicion of her peril. The Raymonds were now once

more in town, a month earlier than usual, to celebrate the nuptials of Juliana with Lord Glamorgan. Her mode of life was brightened. She became a creature of the every-day world; —dined frequently in Brook Street, and sometimes accompanied Lady Raymond and her cousins to places of public amusement. Merstham seemed to place implicit reliance on her prudence; and, when obliged by business, or the pretext of business, to absent himself from their parties, was earnest in his entreaties to Mary to go alone. Like the experienced thief-takers, he carefully forbore all evidence of suspicion, in order to allure back the missing accomplice to his ancient haunts and former associations.

CHAPTER VI.

'Tis something every day we live,
To pity, and perhaps forgive.
But, if infirmities that fall
In common to the lot of all,
A blemish or a sense impaired
Are crimes so little to be spared.
Then farewell all that must create
The comfort of the wedded state.

Cowper.

How merrily goes the world during what is termed the London season!—How completely do all persons enjoying or administering to its pleasures close their eyes against the existence of aught beyond its narrow limitation!—Engrossed by the tumultuous hurry of their own

pursuits, all is bustle, confusion, and officiousness. The ease and rest of thousands are sacrificed to the sport of hundreds; sickness becomes presumption, and sorrow an impertinence; the undertaker an intruder, — the preacher of a world to come, a vain and prating visionary!—

The house of Sir Charles Raymond was more peculiarly the house of feasting. His second daughter, a blooming girl of seventeen, pure from the dissipations of London, being on the eve of becoming a Countess, with all the accessories of countessly dignity:—dress, diamonds, opera boxes, and courtly distinction. Happy Lady Raymond, to achieve such a consummation without a single humiliating effort; thrice happy Juliana, to become wife to the Earl of Glamorgan with even less expenditure of smiles and blushes than had been necessary to render her elder sister the lady of a captain of dragoons!—

Even Sir Charles found much to console him for the necessity of daily dinner parties, and an incessant round of company; for it was his

own first session in parliament as well as his daughter's first and last spinster season in town. It is true when he found his house besieged by detachments of mantua-makers, milliners, jewellers, and all the giddy-paced retainers of vanity, he thought it necessary to affect to be out of humour with the impending dignities of his Right Honourable daughter; while the silly, good-natured Juliana laboured not to smile too broadly or blush too deeply,—divided between her anxiety not to be thought proud by her young friends or childish by the dowager Countess.

"Ay, ay,—this will be a very different wedding from Miss Mary's!"—exclaimed the old housekeeper one morning, as the portentous day approached, to her colleague the old butler; and George Raymond, who chanced to be within hearing, could not forbear ejaculating, "Poor Mary!—may my father and mother never be visited in the misery of their own children for their insufficient care of *her!* Mary may not perhaps have been harshly dealt with among us; but oh! how much has she often

needed, how much does she still need, the consolation of a parent's kindness! "—

Such kindness, indeed, Mrs. Merstham was as little likely as ever to meet in Brook Street. Whenever her carriage stopped at the door, there was a general outcry among the cousins of "Ah! here is Mary!—I am so glad Mary is come!"—for all felt pre-assured of a patient ear and gentle sympathy. Day after day, they told her their distresses, and unfolded their grievances; but none of Mary's did they ever hear. Nay, sometimes when Juliana or Helena proposed to include her in their picnics or water parties, Captain Elwood or Charles Raymond would exclaim, "Oh! pray don't ask her,—we must have that odious husband; and there is not a more disagreeable fellow on the face of the earth than Merstham."

"Merstham has not a word to say that does not bear reference to his own possessions or sensations," observed Charles Raymond one morning as they were planning a party to Richmond.

"Nor has he even a sensation in which other people can sympathize," added Elwood.

"Merstham is a perfect high priest of Lilliput," cried Helena, laughing at her borrowed wit.

"Would to Heaven self-conceit were the worst trait in his character!" added her eldest brother, in a low voice. "Merstham has a vile, vindictive disposition. His selfish, sensual habits remind me of the viper of a menagerie, sleeping away its venomous existence wrapt up in cotton!"

In Mary's presence, however, the young Raymonds were scrupulously attentive to her husband; just as in her husband's presence they were scrupulously *in*attentive to *her*. On another point, too, the cousins were uniformly considerate; from the first they forbore all allusion to the holidays at Warley, and all mention of the name of Henry Marlay; and, even during Merstham's absence at his office, the prudent wife had evidently no desire to find the subject recalled to her attention.

One day, however, one joyous balm-breathing day in June, when the sun seemed to shine as bright for all the world as it might be supposed to do for the future Countess of Glamor-

gan, a party was formed by the Raymonds to dine at Greenwich, which Richard, whose ship was stationed at Sheerness, was invited to join; and Merstham, finding the loan of the Admiralty barge a security for his carriage-horses, condescended to grace the company. The plan succeeded,—the party assembled;—and, after a sufficient quantity of white-bait had been swallowed, and bad champagne pronounced to be excellent, began to disperse again; some to visit the Woolwich museum, some to play the rural in donkey-races upon Blackheath, some to parade leisurely and prosingly along the shady avenues of Greenwich Park;—when Richard Raymond, addressing Mrs. Merstham, who had attached herself to her husband's arm, in the last mentioned group, suddenly exclaimed, "By the way, Mary, whom do you think I was very near bringing here with me to-day?—neither more nor less than your old friend, Henry Marlay!"

"I am glad you brought no accession to our party," interrupted Lady Raymond, overhearing this indiscreet allusion, and hoping to

distract the attention of Merstham. "We were very ill served at the Ship, considering they had two days' notice, and carte-blanche as to price." And she looked reprovingly at her son.

"You know he has been on the continent ever since Christmas?" persisted Dick, who was blest with a sailor's genuine inaccessibility to inuendo. "His health, poor fellow, has never recovered that deuce of a shock it got at Ceylon! But his mother, who accompanied him to the south of France, was obliged to return to England, and Harry consented to bear Lady Mary company. 'Why talk to me of climate; what matters it whether I live or die!' is his constant exclamation. Indeed, ever since he was at Warley in the winter, Harry has been half out of his mind."

"How completely that prejudice about change of climate for pulmonary disorders is exploded!"—cried Lady Raymond, neither much knowing, nor much caring what she said. "It reminds me of poor Dr. Pitcairn, who, when he landed at Lisbon, for change of air,

observed, "And is this the wretched place I have sent so many of my consumptive patients to die in!"—

The bait took. No water party is without its proser; and the dowager Lady Glamorgan, a staunch advocate of the homœopathic system and the theory that no further necessity exists for people to die of a decline, —began a verbose discourse on the text of "acclimatization."—But poor Lady Raymond's well intended efforts were superfluous. Although Sir Charles managed, during the argument, to draw off the young sailor and rate him roundly for his loquacity, Merstham had learned all he wished to know. Henry Marlay was the hero of the *tableau* scene. Henry Marlay was the man by whom his wife had been apostrophised as "my Mary!" Henry Marlay was his enemy,—*Henry Marlay was to be his victim!*—He did not, however, let fall Mary's arm as the discovery dawned upon his mind,—on the contrary, his stiffened limbs seemed to hold it fast as by an involuntary contraction; and so little

did Mrs. Merstham apprehend that anything in the observations of Richard was likely to convey enlightenment to his mind, that had she overheard the fearful words of execration muttered between her husband's lips, she would not have supposed it possible they could be applied to herself!

Meanwhile, as in the case of most parties of pleasure, the persons concerned seemed chiefly anxious to get away, and be pleased elsewhere. All were hurrying to some "indispensable engagement;" some to the House, some to the opera, some to an early party; and, despising the Thames, the Admiralty, and its barge, carriages were found in waiting to convey back the truants by land. Merstham, among others, was not the man to hazard the evening air on the water, now that cholera is supposed to travel per river after sunset, even though his prudence compelled him to have out his own horses; and Mary was on the point of entering the carriage, to return tête-à-tête with him to town, when the voice of her uncle

was heard inquiring "whether any one would be charitable enough to give a place to his boy Dick?"—Obliging as was her disposition, she dared not invite her cousin to take the third place in their chariot. But Merstham did not neglect so desirable an opportunity; and, at his gracious request, Richard was established between himself and his wife.

"There would have been scarcely room here for your friend Marlay?" observed the husband to the young sailor, as the carriage rolled along between the nursery grounds at Camberwell.

"Not much indeed," was Richard's vague reply.

"Young men are accustomed to put up with inconvenience on such occasions and bear them cheerfully, when the party of pleasure is really a pleasant one—really as attractive as that of to-day," persisted Merstham.

"Of course. I remember once when I was on shore at Madeira—" Richard began; but Merstham had no interest to bestow upon what might have happened at Madeira. Reminiscences of sailor-life could give no pain to his

wife, or information to himself. He wanted only to get back to Henry Marlay.

"Has Lady Mary many sons?" he inquired, cutting short the Madeira story.

"Not that I am aware of. I never spoke to Lady Mary in my life," replied Richard, coolly; and Mrs. Merstham's momentary uneasiness was relieved. She saw that her lively cousin had been put on his guard by his father and mother.

"But she has one older than your friend in the navy?"—

"Has she?"—demanded Dick, assuming, in his turn, a tone of interrogation; and, perceiving that the unsilenceable Merstham was about to renew his inquiries, he suddenly thrust his head from the window, exclaiming, "What a pace Glamorgan drives those bays of his! at what a rate they go! And Juliana, too, who used to pretend to be frightened when I put her pony into a canter in the garden chair! Just like women—always in extremes of one kind or other!"

To renew the Marlay chapter after this was

impossible. Merstham felt himself baffled, and baffled by a brainless boy; and all he could do was to sink into his corner, silent and sulky, for the remainder of the drive. By the time they reached that part of the Kent road where the brilliancy of the London lamps and the fragrancy of the London breezes become apparent, he was wholly absorbed in his marital meditations.

"No doubt she has schooled this chattering fellow like the rest of them!" thought he. "Whither does not her system of artifice extend!—and all the time wearing that candid face—expressing herself in that ingenuous tone—sporting those noble sentiments!—What infinite—what infamous hypocrisy;—what a deceiver to lie at the mercy of!—She has soured my daily life with mistrust; I am always wishing something—always apprehending something!—Yes, existence is a burden to me—to *me* whose days have passed so tranquilly, and whose future prospects were once so comfortable!"—And insensibly the man began to picture to himself how, but for the offending Mary, he might have

dozed away that very evening in his easy chair in Grosvenor Place, his cup of tea or newspaper in his hand, by way of recreation. What a contrast to his now unquiet mood;—to the ever-gnawing consciousness that he was not a first object of affection to the mother of his expected child!—

"Let it once be born, and let me never see her more!"—he would sometimes exclaim, as with hurried steps he paced his library. At others, he would ejaculate: "But no doubt it would be a relief to her to escape from me; no doubt she fancies that in the arms of this—this villain—she might yet be happy. But you are mistaken, mistress Mary! if you think to get out of my clutches,—you are mistaken!—You shall not deprive me of the pleasure of watching over your repentance,—of spying out your tears. You are mine now,—lady fair—mine, and to remain so to the last hour of your existence!"—Then, in a lower voice, he would groan out the fearful adjuration of Othello:

I would have her twenty years a-killing!

Now, too, that Richard's indiscretion had proclaimed the actual presence of Marlay in London, Merstham scarcely found courage to quit home. So long as he had been anxious to lay a trap whereby to discover the identity of his rival, he encouraged his wife to go abroad or receive company in Grosvenor Place. But circumstances were altered. If he left her at home but so long as while he fulfilled his public duties, who could insure what was passing during his absence;—who could insure him that his servants were not traitors? Who could insure him when he returned and cast his scrutinizing glances on the patient face of the suffering Mary, that the kiss of wantonness had not polluted its purity?—Who could insure him—who could insure him!—he gasped for breath as he dwelt upon all the contingencies to which his happiness and his honour were exposed.—He gasped for breath,—he wrung his hands,—he cried aloud for very misery!

"That the fellow were but lying dead before me!" he once exclaimed, in a paroxysm

of despair; then struck by sudden self-conviction, he prayed with shuddering fervour that he might not be "led into temptation!"—

Under such circumstances, it is not wonderful that Merstham began to neglect for the first time the duties of his office. He became careless in his attendance; made his appearance too late in the morning, quitted the desk too early in the evening, forgot to prepare the reports, to overlook the abstracts, to speak a few words to this party or listen to a few words from that. His worthy colleague in the black gaiters, Mr. Thumbleton, hinted that complaints had reached their superiors in office; and Merstham, heretofore wont to humble himself under the frowns of authority, listened with a vague smile to his friend's denunciations. At length, reiterated offences called forth a moderate and private rebuke; and Merstham, by way of extenuation, muttered between his teeth the detested name of Henry Marlay!—

"The duties of your office appear less peremptory than they used to be?"—Sir Charles

Raymond unluckily observed to him on the evening of the reprimand; and Merstham immediately took it into his head that his wife had somehow or other obtained intelligence of his humiliation, and communicated it as an excellent jest to her family.

Towards *her* meanwhile, his conduct was becoming daily more inexplicable. In the morning when she woke, he was sometimes standing by her bed side, regarding her with a fixed and terrible gaze; sometimes, in the day, he would enter her presence abruptly, and, sitting down opposite or beside her, fix his eyes upon her face as if to penetrate her inmost thoughts; as as if to ascertain whether she had seen Marlay, or even whether she was musing over the past; until the result of his wildness of demeanour became visible in the nervous tremours with which poor Mary was seized whenever her husband made his appearance. She knew not why, but her confidence in him was gone. She could not bear to be alone with him; yet in company trembled lest his growing eccentricity should excite attention. Had

her parents been living, she would have rushed to their tender bosoms to weep out her tale of trouble. But she had neither father nor brother to defend, nor mother to console her; and of what avail to complain to the worldly-minded aunt and uncle by whom her youth had been rendered miserable, that she was still more miserable under the roof of him whom they had chosen for her husband?—

CHAPTER VII.

This jealousy
Is for a precious creature. As she is rare
Must it be violent.

Winter's Tale.

WEDDINGS of due distinction are rarely solemnized before the close of the season, lest they should interrupt the well ordered routine of the rail-road of pleasure; and that of Juliana Raymond made no exception to the rule. Lord Glamorgan's guardians had to give up their trust, 'ere the young peer assumed the trust of others; the lawyers had

to revise and re-revise the acts and deeds by which the happy couple were to be restrained from defrauding each other, in case they should become the *un*happy, or their future progeny prevented from playing the pelican's chick with their parents. The scorching sun of July was fated therefore to glow upon the wedding day; and Lady Raymond was denied the pleasure of paying for forced peaches for her *déjeuné*.

Mrs. Merstham, meanwhile, the patient confidant of all the family, redoubled the length and frequency of her visits to Brook Street; eager to escape the troubled aspect of her home, and content to lend her ear to Glamorgan's complaints of the dilatoriness of his solicitor, or dulness of his coachmaker; to Sophia Elwood's murmurs that "papa and mamma cared for nothing now but Juliana;" and to the predictions of the young men that "they should find Warley deuced dull when Ju was gone." Helena and the bride were the only two who had nothing to complain of; Juliana's tears being dried by the prospect of her

countess's coronet, and Helena's by that of succeeding to the honours of Miss Raymondship.

But there was something in the stir and bustle of the house, and more particularly in the maternal and paternal anxieties of Sir Charles and his wife, which grated painfully on the feelings of Mary.

It was now just a twelvemonth since these people had conducted *her* to the altar; just a twelvemonth since *her* bandboxes of wedding finery had been hurried into the house. And who had shed tears for *her?*—Who had experienced a moment's misgiving as to the temper or principles of the man to whom *her* vows of eternal love and submission were to be dedicated?—Who had cared to inquire into the antecedents of his family,—their temper,—their temperament?—Alas! Merstham's official eminence had been accepted as the voucher of his respectability; his house in Grosvenor Place as the certificate of his worthiness. A man with an income of four thousand a year proposing to a portionless niece,

could in fact be neither mad, nor bad, nor even indifferent!—Mary recollected how Sir Charles, without actually *forcing* him on her acceptance, had pointed out in the sternest and least ornamental prose that her situation in life was a very precarious one; that, in case of the decease of Lady Raymond and himself, she would be destitute of a home; that her net income amounted to eighty-four pounds per annum; and if he did not add that it was her *duty* to herself and the family to accept so respectable a protector, he implied it as plainly as ever yet injunction was implied by uncle. She recollected that the authoritative Lady Raymond had said to her a few days previously to her marriage, "I hope and trust, Mary, I shall see no tears on Thursday. It would be a very bad compliment to Mr. Merstham, and a poor return for all the kindness your uncle has shown you, if you seemed to form with reluctance a connexion we judge so suitable, and so well calculated to secure your happiness."

And thus, poor girl, even the luxury of tears

was denied her,—to *her*, who had so little besides; while Juliana, rich in the devoted affection of the lover of her choice, surrounded by troops of friends, and sinking under the prosperities of life, might have wept fountains unreproved!

Sometimes, indeed, Mary indulged a momentary intention of confiding to one or other of the young Raymonds, to George or Richard, the secret of her woes and terrors. But the sailor was Marlay's friend; while with respect to George, so inexactly was she assured of the origin of her husband's strange alteration of demeanour, that she was sometimes tempted to fancy him jealous of Mr. Raymond, and resentful of her aunt and uncle's former anxieties concerning their son. There was consequently none,—not one,—to whom she could open her heart.

If any thing could have tended to demonstrate to a man of Merstham's character the folly of his proceedings, it might have been the judgment by which they were shortly overtaken! A change of ministry had

occurred about the period of his marriage, by which his friends in the administration were removed: and, though the office he held, not being of a political nature, was independent of parties, there were no longer any in power to screen the irregularities of his proceedings. A high character of twenty years operated, indeed, for some time in his favour. The remonstrances addressed to him were of a mild and private nature; but when it plainly appeared that neither forbearance nor menaces had any effect in inducing a reformation, it was signified to him with more consideration than is always testified in a ministerial ukase, that he had better avail himself of his length of services to retire upon the superannuation list. Unhappily, the letter in which this unwelcome hint was contained, lay upon his library table on the very night he returned from Brook Street, after witnessing the signing of Lord Glamorgan's marriage settlements. It had been an evening of that general hilarity when people are too merry to

be wise; and Charles Raymond, who entertained an especial dislike against Merstham, had been amusing himself by worrying the cold-blooded animal into a fever; had made him the butt of his pleasantries without suspecting that the mask of moderation under which the fury of the quizzee was disguised, could be afterwards thrown aside at home to reveal the distorted features of a maniac.

"See!" cried he, extending the Treasury letter towards his wife with one hand, and dashing the open paper violently with the other,—"see to what humiliations I am reduced—see for what I have to thank you!"

"To thank *me?*" gently repeated Mary, now in some degree accustomed to the ebullitions of her husband's temper.

"Yes,—you—you—*you!*—do I speak plainly—do I make myself understood?—or is there need for you to mock me by reiterating my words like a parrot?"—vociferated Merstham.

"I shall perhaps understand you better,"

said Mary, striving not to tremble, "when I have perused the letter." And she extended her hand to receive it.

"Oh!—you would read it, would you;—you would taste, drop by drop, my cup of bitterness;—would luxuriate in the insults these fools heap upon me?—But you shall be disappointed!—I will not afford you the opportunity to go giggling to those accursed fools in Brook Street who are the cause of my undoing, over the tale of my being chidden like a school-boy, and driven forth like a dog!"—

"I do not understand you!" cried Mary, sitting down, unable longer to support herself. "Believe me, I have not the slightest idea to what you refer!"—

"You will soon learn, Madam, you will soon learn;—I owe you something for the numerous lessons you have taught me!"—exclaimed the infuriated man. He was about to fling the letter into her lap, when some sudden impulse of rage induced him to tear it into a thousand pieces with his teeth: then dashing

the fragments on the floor, to stamp upon them with all the intemperance of frenzy.

Not daring to anticipate what outrage might follow, Mary rose to quit the room. "Yes! —go!" cried he. "Sneak away,—crawl into shelter,—you are right to dread my violence, for God alone knows whither it may lead me! But no matter!—there is shame enough in store for both of us,—ruin enough for both of us; and 'tis some comfort to know that you and your brat will be beggars for my sake. —Ay! I shall set my mark upon you both. —All men will know you for my own!"—

And a sort of rattling laugh rang in the ears of Mary as she closed the library door, and managed to escape into her own room. That room she knew her husband would not approach. That room he had religiously avoided from the moment of his return from Warley. In that room she was still secure;—still free to lie down and weep—perhaps to lie down and die!—

The day following happened to be the one appointed for Juliana's gorgeous wedding; and

Mrs. Merstham, whose night was passed in tears and bitter self-communing, found it impossible to raise her heavy head from her pillow in time to attend the ceremony. To her amazement, however, she learnt from Mrs. Stanley her maid, that Merstham was up, dressed, and inquiring for her at an early hour.

"Is he pretty well this morning?"—she demanded,—not daring more explicitly to avow her alarms.

"Quite well ma'am, only very much concerned to find you do not feel equal to go to the wedding," replied Stanley. "Just listen ma'am, and you will hear master whistling on the stairs."

And Mary *did* listen, and *did* hear. The mood of the monster was changed. He had worked off his ire by despatching to the Treasury a dignified letter containing the unqualified resignation of his office. He fancied he had given blow for blow, and was content; not understanding that such blows are precisely those which the meek ones of his Majesty's

Treasury turn their right cheek as well as the left to be smitten withal: and that his letter was likely to produce no other effect than the nomination of his successor. The effort sufficed, however, to smooth down his ruffled plumes, ere he joined the party at the Raymond's; and when, having sent a message to his wife begging to know whether she would accompany him, Mrs. Merstham made an attempt to rise and made it in vain, he determined to go alone.

Aware that the news of his retreat from office must shortly become public, Merstham chose to be the first to announce it; assuming at the same time so elated a tone, as to make it seem a matter of considerable exultation. He appeared at the wedding as one of its gayest guests; and several good easy members of the community, (including the Dowager Lady Glamorgan), were heard to observe— "A warm-hearted pleasant man that Mr. Merstham! He is much more lively than half the young men of the day, and yet, they say, such an excellent man of business!"—While others,

who were neither good nor easy, added in a whisper, " I fear his little quiet still-life wife is not quite so amiable as she might be—I suspect she is a little envious. Ever since this fine match of her cousin's has been going on, Mrs. Merstham has appeared quite distressed. She cannot forgive Juliana for having risen in the world above herself."

Meanwhile, though Merstham's spirits might be elevated by the strong efforts, and strong madeira with which he strove to raise them during the wedding breakfast, the time came for him to return to the vexations of home, and his countenance fell! Nearly two thousand per annum had been subtracted from his income at one fell swoop: and, with the remaining two, how would it be possible to keep up his house in Grosvenor Place in all its beloved array of menials, of equipage, of luxurious comfort?—Already a portion of his capital was involved in hazardous speculations, in order to yield the per centage satisfying his avarice; "And now," thought he, as he mused upon

the troubled waste of do-nothingness and gain-nothingness before him,—the waste his own madness had created—"now, *all* I have must be perilled!—I can be but ruined! 'Twill be only adding a crowning drop to the cup of evil!"—And he laughed aloud as he crossed the deserted park—from Grosvenor to Piccadilly gate, in reflecting that she would be involved in his fall; that *she* who had married him only to batten on his prosperity, would shortly be degraded, she and her child, by the stigma of his poverty!

That day, that wedding-day, to which she had looked forward as to a moment of promised sunshine, Mary remained wholly confined to her room. Merstham, who declined joining the brilliant dinner party in Brook Street upon the plea of his wife's indisposition, enjoyed a solitary meal in lonely state; when, just as he was about to rise from table, a letter was placed in his hands from the first Lord of the Treasury to whom his resignation of the morning had been addressed, begging

him with ceremonious civility, to re-consider the business; and appointing the following day to receive his definitive reply.

"Did one of the Treasury messengers bring this, or Lord Ballitore's private servant?" he inquired with some surprise.

"Lord Ballitore's private servant Sir, or a Treasury porter?"—repeated the astonished butler. "I received it from my mistress's maid."

"From *whom?*"—reiterated Merstham in his turn."

"From Mrs. Stanley, Sir, from Mrs. Merstham's own maid.

"But who gave it to Mrs. Stanley?—How came they to carry up one of my letters to Mrs. Merstham's room?"—

"Indeed, Sir, I don't know; I was not aware that any letter had been sent here for *you*. A large packet came here this afternoon for my missess."

"Of letters?"

"I can't justly say, Sir. It was a square packet."

"Who took it in?"—

"The under-footman, Sir. They gave it down the area steps, and John happened to be in the way."

"Where is John? Send John here directly!"

And lo! John, eagerly interrogated, confirmed the statement that about five o'clock he had received a packet addressed to Mrs. Merstham, which he had forthwith delivered to her maid.

"Was it brought by a strange servant?"—

"Yes, Sir."

"What livery?—Do you know Lord Ballitore's when you see it?"—

"Yes, Sir; blue and silver, with yellow plush inexpressibles; my Lord's people sit next us in church. I can answer for it that it was *not* Lord Ballitore's."

"But you do not know *whose?*—

"The young man was in mourning; and, now I comes to think of it, Sir, Anne the kitchen-maid said he was fellow servant of a cousin of hers, what lives along with a young

gentleman, a navy-officer, which is nephew to one of the ministers."

"Enough, you may go down again," cried Merstham, who had now obtained the information he desired. And the next moment he was standing by the bedside of his wife.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lod. May be the letters moved him;
For, as I think they do command him home
Deputing Cassio in his government.
Des. By my troth, I'm glad on't!
Oth. Indeed?
Des. My Lord!
Oth. I am glad to see you mad!
Des. How, sweet Othello?
Oth. (Striking her) Devil!
Des I have not deserved this!
Shakspeare.

It was an easy matter for Mrs. Merstham to assure her husband in the most solemn terms, that she had never directly or indirectly attempted to engage in his behalf the interest of Lord Ballitore; but, when Merstham in-

terrupted her asseverations by demanding from whom she had received the packet of letters delivered to her that evening by her maid;—Mary was painfully silenced. It was not that the despatch in question contained any thing she was afraid of disclosing; but it now appeared beyond a doubt that Marlay was the object of her husband's frantic jealousy; and, on that head, she did not feel blameless. She summoned courage, however, to reply with tolerable composure, "The packet to which you allude, was sent me by a friend of my cousin Richard, with whom I was intimately acquainted at Warley, previously to my marriage. Mr. Marlay, whose mother is sister to Lord Ballitore, happened to be sitting with his uncle when the letter containing your resignation was brought in."

"And his affection for your cousin Richard, induced him to play the suitor in my behalf?" —sneered the husband.

"No!" replied Mrs. Merstham with firmness. "Mr. Marlay's regard for myself prompted him to beg Lord Ballitore would give you

time to re-consider a measure that appeared precipitate."

"And how dared he presume to be so officious?" cried Merstham. "Who gave him leave to pry into my affairs or give his opinion on my proceedings?—Shall I tell you who gave him leave?—Shall I explain to you, what prompted his insolent zeal?"—And, grasping her arm with his hand, he shook it with violence.

"Rather let me explain to *you*," replied Mary, her heart revolting against such unmerited harshness;—and, having taken a letter from her pillow, she placed it in her husband's hands.

"Beneath her very pillow;—warm, warm from contact with her very cheek!"—ejaculated Merstham, snatching it from her trembling hold. And having approached the candles burning on the table, he proceeded to decypher the following lines:

"Dear Mrs. Merstham,

"I trust that old acquaintanceship will plead

my excuse for the liberty I take in forwarding the enclosed through your hands. I was with my uncle, Lord Ballitore, at the Home Office this morning, when he received a communication nearly concerning your interests; a circumstance that induced me to interfere in a mode which the accompanying note will explain; and which I trust may not prove offensive to yourself, or any of the parties concerned.

I am, dear Mrs. Merstham,

Truly yours,

H. MARLAY,"

Bury Street,
August 7.

"A well-concocted epistle, I must admit! —cried Merstham, throwing it contemptuously on the table. "Not a word to which the most susceptible husband could object;—not a syllable but is calculated to bear the scrutiny of judge and jury. It does you credit, Madam; for I have not so high an opinion of a cock-pit education, as to imagine this

fellow capable of stringing his generalities together without prompting. I no longer wonder you were so ready to make an exhibition of your correspondence."

"I was, and am ready to do any thing for your satisfaction," replied Mary. "But you do injustice to Mr. Marlay if you suppose he needs any assistance of mine to enable him to act like a man of spirit and honour."

"How!—you advocate his cause, then, openly and without reserve?"—cried Merstham, regarding his wife's generous defence of Marlay as a sarcasm levelled at himself.

"Not further than common justice demands," she replied.

"Trouble not yourself unnecessarily with the administration of justice!"—said Merstham, again approaching the bed, and addressing her in a low concentrated voice—"the time will come, Mary, when you may chance to receive more of justice,—more of retribution,—than you are altogether prepared to meet. Yes! mark me,—the time will come!"—

Without waiting a reply, the infuriated man

quitted the room; and, on the morrow, Lord Ballitore received from Mr. Merstham a second letter, less gracious if possible than the first, containing a reiteration of his demand to retire from the service of his Majesty's government. On the morrow, too, Mary received, in her turn, from the petty tyrant an intimation that they were immediately to leave town on a tour of pleasure; and the tone of voice in which he uttered, "Do you hear me, Mary?—Does it not rejoice your very heart to think of spending weeks and months to come *téte-à-téte* with your husband?"—thrilled through her delicate frame, like a forewarning of vengeance.

The case was now becoming too serious to be trifled with. Mrs. Merstham's inference that Marlay, having once been tempted to address her, might perhaps on some future occasion stir up against her by terms less guarded the wrathful indignation of her husband, determined her to apply for advice and assistance to Sir Charles Raymond, previously to the departure of the family from town. She repaired, therefore, alone to Brook Street,

at a moment when she was sure of finding her uncle; but no sooner did the prudent man perceive his niece enter his private room, —wearing on her countenance the expression of a deep-seated sorrow attempered by strong resolution,—than he attempted to evade the interview. He pretended an appointment, and spoke of the necessity he was under of quitting her in five minutes; apprehensive that, driven to desperate measures, she was about to consult him respecting a separation from Merstham; for there is nothing in which wordly-minded people are more careful to avoid interfering, than the differences between man and wife.—But Mary's earnestness was not to be put aside. Her feelings were powerfully excited;—her courage was screwed to the "sticking place."

"Uncle!" — said she, approaching Sir Charles's writing-table, and looking steadily in his face, "you must not refuse to hear me. I need scarcely remind *you* that my father died before I was born, or that when my poor mother lay upon her death-bed, knowing it

to be her death-bed, she found strength to place in your arms your only brother's only child,—reminding you that it was about to be left destitute in an unfriendly world!—You told her that, if fated to become an orphan, it need not therefore be destitute; that it should have a place in your home,—a place in your heart,—that it should be in after-life as one of your own children."

"*I did!*"—exclaimed Sir Charles in a disturbed tone of voice, perceiving that she paused for a reply.

"And thus re-assured, with her hand gratefully clasping your arm, my poor mother departed in peace!—Her last faint words thanked you, uncle,—her last faint looks were fixed on her child!"—

Again Mary paused; but *this* time, Sir Raymond was too much agitated to reply.

"Promises uttered to the dying," pursued Mrs. Merstham, "are said to be doubly sacred; I will not ask you how you have fulfilled yours. I have sometimes asked that question

of myself when shedding my tears in solitude, and shrank from the reply that presented itself; for I felt that I had no right to pass sentence upon those having authority over me. Let us, therefore, advert no further to the past; it is for the *future* I claim your aid, for the *present*, your council. In the name of my father and mother, uncle, I beseech you to help me!—Do not put me away with cold looks or careless answers.—My affliction is a very deep one; yea, almost too heavy for me to bear!"

Much affected by the mild fervour of this address, Sir Charles folded his niece to his bosom; and, having placed her in a seat beside him, prepared to listen to her communication. As she gradually disclosed the origin and aggravation of Merstham's intemperate deportment, the Baronet's involuntary ejaculations varied from, "Jealous, poor fellow, a mere fit of jealousy;" to "mad, decidedly mad; scarcely fit to be trusted at large!"—

"You are certain, my dear Mary," he added,

at the conclusion of her narrative, "that you have given your husband no other causes of offence than those you have related?"

"Quite certain. I can tax myself with no fault against Mr. Merstham."

"Yet he has treated you with unmanly violence; his conduct inspires you with perpetual terror.—Painful as is exposure, in such a case you cannot live with this man. You must part from him, Mary. You must come home to us again. And be assured, my dear, that if you abide by my decision, no means in my power shall be spared, to render your life happy, and secure your future comfort."

Mrs. Merstham's mind mechanically reverted to the solemn pledge to a similar effect, tendered to her dying mother. But it was not her uncle's breach of promise which influenced her present determination.

"I have no intention to part from Mr. Merstham," she replied. "Duty requires me to abide with the husband of my choice. I married him for richer for poorer, for better

for worse; and if he is now poorer and less rational, I must not, therefore, abandon him. All I desire is that, should he be moved to any extremity against me, you will bear witness to the world I concealed nothing of the difficulties of my situation from those who have a right to demand an account of my conduct. I beseech you, also, my dear uncle, to communicate in person to Mr. Marlay, all I have related; warning him of the great injury he may do me by a show of the ordinary courtesies of life,—still more, by a display of friendly regard. I have never seen him,—I will never willingly see him again; but, should chance throw him in my way during the continuance of my husband's present state of irritation, I feel convinced the meeting would be fatal to one or both of us."

"I will see Marlay myself this very day," said Sir Charles, "and explain to him all you desire; impressing upon him in the strongest terms the urgency of discretion. Meanwhile, my dear girl, comfort yourself with the knowledge that let what will occur, you have a

champion in your uncle's person, and a shelter under his roof."

Whether comforted or not by the assurance, Mrs. Merstham, at least, expressed herself grateful. The following day was appointed for her departure for the Isle of Wight, where her husband possessed a small estate which he was desirous of visiting previously to renewing the lease of a farmer, many years its occupant; and Mary was to remain at Ryde while Merstham executed his business at Culverfield. It afforded her no small satisfaction that, before leaving town, she had found an opportunity for explanation with the only person, saving her husband, whom she recognized as entitled to sit in judgment upon her conduct. Her uncle could not but seize an early occasion for the discharge of his important commission; and thus solemnly warned, Henry Marlay would doubtless have the good taste to abstain from all further interference in her affairs.

CHAPTER IX.

I will be found most cunning in my patience,
But—(dost thou hear?) most bloody.

Shakspeare.

VERY different were the emotions experienced by the husband and wife, as their carriage quitted the metropolis, to convey them to the coast! Mary, for a twelvemonth past a reluctant denizen of London, felt soothed and revived by the aspect of the country, and her escape from the tumultuous littlenesses of the great city; while Merstham, who, having determined to let for a term of years the house in Grosvenor Place once the tabernacle of his pride, delayed the mea-

sure only that his wife's confinement might take place there in October, already felt as if turning his back for ever upon the temple of his household gods!—

His family happened to be Southampton people; and once in every year for many past, it had been his custom to pay a short visit to his father; when it afforded him no trifling gratification to parade before the friends of his early years, the progress of his ever-growing importance. His office, which was only one among many in London, was of stupendous consequence in the eyes of a Southampton tea-table. But now for the first time, he was careful to take the Portsmouth rather than the Southampton road to the Isle of Wight. For worlds he would not have paraded the spectacle of his humiliation before his former associates; and the contrast between his past and present mode of quitting town, served to rouse anew the evil spirit haunting his perturbed bosom!

Mrs. Merstham, accustomed to watch his varying moods of mind, noted the gloomy

agitation of his demeanour during their journey; but indulged a hope that when fixed in their cheerful villa at Ryde, where he had promised to pass a week previously to leaving her for Culverfield, the tranquillity of the spot, change of air, scene and society, and above all the absence of the Raymond family, (the objects of his especial aversion) might in some degree tend to his restoration. Nor were her expectations disappointed. The aspect of Ryde with its intermingling gardens, its aristocratic villas, its busy pier, its endless array of pleasure-boats, its glassy sea, seemed for a moment to inspire him with pleasant thoughts. The villa engaged for them was gay, airy and commanding a lively sea view; and the new tenant forgot for a while that he was Mr. Merstham of Grosvenor Place,—a discarded placeman, and the dupe of that ancient family, the Raymonds of Warley Manor,—while inhaling the unwonted freshness of the breeze, or basking upon his shrubby lawn.

Had Mary been wise, she would have left him to the influence of nature, and of those enjoy-

ments which, affecting the senses only, excite no consciousness of moral individuality. Merstham might have lost sight of himself and her, had she not, dreading the effects of solitude upon his mind, attached herself pertinaciously to his side in all his haunts and wanderings. She hoped to make him feel that there was still a happy future in store for him; that, relieved from the cares of office, his wife and child, his home and competence, held forth prospects such as many would envy; little conjecturing that the fixed idea in his mind was, "This woman has been the disturber of my peace,—the ruin of my fortunes, and will cling to me like a cleaving curse for evermore.—"

"Do you set off for Culverfield early to-morrow?" she inquired the evening before his projected departure for the farm, as they returned together from a sailing excursion in the vessel belonging to the villa.

"I have not made up my mind. Are you particularly anxious to know?" he replied, regarding her with an air of suspicion.

"By no means," rejoined Mary, "I was merely considering that if you did not go till the cool of the evening—"

"I shall go at ten in the morning."

"In that case, I will give up my scheme of accompanying you part of the way, and take my drive as usual after dinner. Stanley can go with me. I am not disposed to drive out alone," said Mrs. Merstham, aware of her husband's tenacity on that point.

And in the evening, after Merstham's departure for Culverfield, much as Mary felt inclined to enjoy a solitary hour, she set forth, accompanied by her maid, to take an airing on St. Helen's Road, and was soon absorbed in her reflections, as the barouche rolled rapidly along the over-arched road leading towards Fairy Hill. There was a favourite spot upon the shore between the village of Seaview and the headlands of St. Helen's, to which, some summers before, when passing the autumn at Ryde with Lady Raymond and her cousins, Mary had twice resorted with parties of pleasure. Mrs. Mers-

tham had in truth felt anxious, from the moment of her arrival in the island, to re-visit the place, and revive those by-gone associations;—for, sad as her youth had been, far darker were her present prospects; and, having determined to profit by her husband's absence for the purpose, she now quitted the carriage accompanied by her servants, and made her way with ease to the little promontory overgrown with lofty trees, commanding a delicious extent of sand as white and hard as marble.

Her first care was to renew her acquaintance with a fisherman and his wife, whose cottage had been formerly the place of rendez-vous; and who now eagerly invited her to rest and refresh herself under their roof. The aspect of a large family of healthy, hardy, half-clothed children, made her regret to find herself unprovided with the means of testifying her goodwill in return for their cup of milk and slice of brown bread; and having made inquiries into their necessities previously to quitting the cottage, she promised to drive that way and visit them again the follow-

ing evening. Mary knew better than to wait the return of Merstham for the fulfilment of an act of benevolence!

Amid all her wretchedness, it was some comfort to be the origin of happiness to others; and a gratifying occupation was afforded the following morning, in making up a collection of such necessaries as seemed most wanting in the hovel of her humble friends. After an early dinner, she again set forth upon her expedition. But the Londonized lady's maid, who had "voted it a bore" the preceding night to make her way through sand and brushwood to hunt out a cabin smelling of sea-weed and dried whitings, pretended household business of importance, as an excuse for staying at home; a pretext readily accepted by Mrs. Merstham, who by no means regretted to shake off the company of so fine a lady when bound upon so homely an errand. The evening was serenely beautiful;—the sun was making "a golden set," and Mary promised herself unmixed pleasure in her expedition. She had no time to lose; having been delayed by the retarded execution of

one of her commissions, she feared it would be dusk before she attained her place of destination. By the time she reached the high-grown avenues leading to Fairy Hill, the evening was in fact closing. But, on approaching the cottage, she found the little family eagerly looking out for their benefactress; and rejoiced that she had not been tempted to postpone her visit to another day.

Unwilling to expose the misery of these poor people to the supercilious inquisition of her servants, Mrs. Merstham ordered the footman to await her with the carriage at the point of the road nearest the cabin; while she devoted a few charitable minutes to listen to the mother's recapitulation of the winter sufferings of her little tribe; more especially of terrors rendered agonizing during the professional absence of her husband, in one of the St. Helen's pilot-boats. Though eager to depart, and conscious she had done unwisely in coming or staying so late, Mary could not make up her mind to wound the feelings of the woman by cutting short her

narrative of toils and troubles; till at length the growing darkness admonished her that it was indispensable to depart. The whole horde immediately put forward to escort her, boys, girls, mother,—the little dogs and all;—and Mrs. Merstham did not regret to find herself so extensively accompanied when, as they waded along the rushy wilderness towards the spot where the carriage was waiting, she discerned through the twilight the figure of a man—and, as far as she could discern, a gentleman,—advancing along the path to meet her.

That Merstham had unexpectedly returned, and obtained such information from Mrs. Stanley as enabled him to follow and trace her out, was her first impression; and already she trembled in anticipating the reproof which she knew awaited her,—convinced that Merstham would find cause for suspicion and disapproval in such a visit, to such a place, at such an hour, and in such circumstances. She would have given much to avoid the encounter,—much that she had never attempted the drive to St. Helen's.

Far greater, however, was her consternation when the figure having attained her side, she found her arm gently taken, and discovered that the person by whom she was thus unceremoniously accosted, was no other than Henry Marlay!—Unable to repress the exclamations of surprise, regret, and reproach that arose from the depths of her heart, Mary was too much agitated to feel embarrassed by the reiterated thanks of the fisherman's wife to her "good gentleman," or to perceive that, mistaking the stranger for the husband of their patroness, the whole family judged their further attendance superfluous. Already both mother and children had wished her good night and scudded back to their den; when, on reaching the barouche, Mary perceived that her servant was no longer in attendance.

"Your man is gone forward with my horse to Ryde," said Marlay, opening the door and letting down the step for her. "You must, therefore, accept my company in his stead. Do you fear to trust yourself with me, Mary? No matter!—I must have half an hour's con-

versation with you.—*I must!*—It is useless to oppose me!"

And, conscious of the inadequacy of her resistance under such circumstances, Mary entered the carriage and suffered Henry to place himself by her side, ere she gave vent to the trouble and resentment with which her heart was overcharged.

"You little guess how far you may injure me by such a proceeding!" was her first incoherent ejaculation. "What cruel rashness, after the entreaties I addressed to you through my uncle!"

"Entreaties to me, and through Sir Charles Raymond?" exclaimed Marlay.

"Who pledged himself in your name, that you would attempt no futrher communication with me or mine!"

"I made no such engagement,—none such was ever demanded of me," he replied. "It was but a few days ago, I accidently learnt from your cousin George, that my interference with Lord Ballitore had produced unsatisfactory results; and that you were afraid,—

(yes, Mary, he used the word *afraid*,)—of the consequences likely to arise from a recurrence of my well-intended officiousness. Pressed by my earnest interrogations, Raymond admitted that you were unhappy,—most unhappy; and disclosed, fact by fact, the miseries of your condition!—Judge, Mary, what were my feelings at the discovery."

"What imprudence!"—cried Mrs. Merstham, "and my uncle, to whom I confided all as to a father!"

"To know you unhappy—to know your ease, your peace, nay, your very life in peril—and in peril for my sake,—was more than I could bear!" continued Marlay; "and, from the moment of my interview with Raymond, I have thought, felt, and acted, dearest Mary, but with reference to *you*. Existence was already a burthen to me, even when I supposed that it was to myself alone it was given to suffer the miseries arising from your marriage. But, when I found that *you*, too, were unhappy — that *your* prospects were

blighted,—your days accursed—then, Mary, then, I—"

"Spare me—spare me!" interrupted Merstham's wife, covering her face with her hands. "These are not words to which I can permit myself to listen. The thoughtlessness of my uncle affords no excuse to *us* for entering into these forbidden details."

"You *must* listen to me, Mary," persisted Marlay; "if not to me—the only being on earth truly devoted to the care of your happiness—to whom can you confide the secret of your sufferings?—Yes!—you *must* listen to me!—Our time is very precious.—It was but yesterday I was apprized that the fellow's absence at Culverfield afforded the chance of an interview without danger to yourself. Without a moment's delay, I hastened to Ryde; where, from one of your servants, I obtained such particulars of your movements as enabled me to meet you here."

"From one of my servants?—from Stanley! What treachery!" — cried Mrs. Merstham.

horror-struck at the probability of discovery on the part of her husband.

"Pardon *her* and pardon *me!*" resumed Marlay. "Refrain from resentment against your friends, dearest Mary, while you have so powerful an enemy to cope with; — a man with whom your very life is at stake,— a ruffian,—*a madman!*"

"That last word should plead his excuse," said Mrs. Merstham. "His reason, I fear, *is* affected. Madness can alone account for his exaggerated sentiments and illusions; and what right have I to resent an infirmity inflicted by the dispensation of Providence?"—

"You have a right, in self-defence, to evade its fearful consequences," observed Marlay. "To live under the roof of a lunatic is surely an excess of heroism? — Mary! you must quit this man."

Involuntarily Mrs. Merstham receded from her companion; but she uttered no immediate reply.

"Your safety, dearest Mary, is just now of

double moment. One of Merstham's paroxysms might call up emotions that would destroy you. For your own sake, therefore, and the sake of your child, you must leave him."

"You think so!"—cried Mrs. Merstham, with almost ironical bitterness. "The best advice you can give me, is to dishonour my good name for ever, in order to escape from vague alarms, arising perhaps from my own pusillanimity?—I thank you!"

"Mary, this is no moment for taunts,—no moment for misapprehension!" said Marlay, forcibly taking and detaining her hand. "'Tis the last time I may speak to you for years,—the last time I may ever speak to you again!"

"Let not our interview serve then to perpetuate humiliating reminiscences," faltered Mary, irresistibly touched. "I would fain continue to remember you, Mr. Marlay, with esteem and regard!"

"Such esteem, such regard, as admitted of your giving your hand to another!"—was

Marlay's involuntary ejaculation. "But 'tis no time to revert to past grievances. So great are the afflictions with which your marriage has beset you, and so imminent is the risk of passing but another day under the roof of your husband, that the whole world will admit you to be justified in seeking safety elsewhere."

"With *you*, perhaps?"—interrupted Mary, with renewed bitterness.

"Nothing would be more easy," continued Marlay, without noticing her interruption, "than to find on the continent a refuge from Mr. Merstham's groundless fury. Delay but till his return, and you may fall a sacrifice to your weakness; but exercise your strength of mind, prove yourself superior to the idle interpretations that may be placed upon your conduct, and safety and tranquillity still await you! 'Tis now ten years, Mary, since I first beheld your face;—'tis now ten years since I swore to receive from *you* the ruling influences of my life!—From that hour to this, my word has not been forfeited.—Do not mistrust it now;—re-

sign yourself to my guidance,—rely upon my attachment,—consent to be happy!"

"To be happy as your mistress!"—cried Mrs. Merstham with indignation. "Have you then so little understood,—*do* you so unworthily appreciate me?"—

"Do you so unworthily appreciate *me*, as to judge me capable of such a proposition?"—retorted Henry Marlay, with equal warmth. "Do you imagine that I set so poor a value on you, so poor a value on myself, as to be ambitious of such an humiliation?—No,—Mary,—think better of me!—All is indeed arranged for your escape; but arranged as it would have been had my own sister fallen into the gripe of a madman. My mother, the kindest and best of mothers,—a woman whose high reputation places her above suspicion—landed this morning with me at Cowes, where Lord Ballitore's yacht is still lying, to transport you both to France, to Guernsey, to the Mediterranean—to any spot on earth you may select for your abode. Lady Mary will be your protectress, your companion, your

friend; even as she would have been to the chosen wife of her son, had you deigned to wait my return from the East. But, as regards *myself*, Mary, I see your face no more! From the moment you quit your husband's roof, I swear to you by all that is dear and sacred to both of us,—I will never attempt to approach your presence,—I will even solicit from my uncle some government employment in London, that I may remain ostensible to the eye of the world and secure you from imputation. My mother and I are rich, Mary, and have none but ourselves to care for; your safety is our present, our first, our only object."

Mrs. Merstham, hitherto silent from shame and deep emotion, could now scarcely trust herself to express the struggle of her feelings. To be less than grateful for such considerate kindness, was impossible; to profit by the disinterested devotion of such a lover, seemed equally out of the question. It would have been comparatively easy to poor Mary to accept the bounties of a stranger.

"Think me not ungracious," said she,

when at length she found words to express herself. "Believe me I feel to its utmost extent the nobleness of your conduct;—but, this must not be, Harry. Circumstances have thrown an eternal blight over my destinies; let not the sentence of desolation extend to yours. Years have passed, you say, since your affections first became mine; and, had you then uttered but a single word expressive of the attachment you now so warmly avow, you and I had been spared the bitterness of many a despairing hour!—But what right had I to suppose you loved me?—No!—I dared not even hope it; or the utmost of my uncle's severities would never have induced me to give my hand to another!"

"*Nothing* ought to have induced you to give your hand to such a fellow as Merstham," interrupted Marlay; "*no* persuasions—*no* authority!"

"Reflect on my position!" pleaded Mary. "Reflect on the misery of knowing myself to be unloved—dependent—disregarded—no parents to watch over my welfare,—no friends to

uphold me. In my own defence, I was forced to become a calculator, at an age when others of my sex enjoy their youthful pleasures without a care! I was compelled to the narrow virtue of prudence—of forecast. I had no family—no friends;—I alone was concerned in the care of my own happiness:—forgive me if I was selfish."

"Willingly, were your happiness *really* effected by even the most sordid calculations. But you have made yourself miserable, Mary."

"I have—but let me not make myself infamous!"

"Is there infamy, then, in securing your life and that of your child?"

"There is infamy in abandoning one whom the consciousness of my aversion has driven to despair, and despair to ruin!"

"You think it kinder towards Merstham to stay with him till, in some fit of frenzy, he becomes your murderer or his own?"—

"Hush!"—cried Mary—"Hush!—he will never proceed to acts of violence, unless animated by indiscretion on *your* part; I have

hopes of him, Henry. Now that he is away from London and the Raymonds, I have hopes of him."

"And I—*none!*" replied her companion.

"You prove it by the rashness of your present proceeding," remonstrated Mrs. Merstham. "Should Merstham discover through the servants—whom I, for my own part, am too proud to warn against disclosure,—that we have met—"

"Fear nothing!—I have insured the discretion of the servants."

"And compromised me by bribing their silence!—But supposing my husband had anticipated his departure from Culverfield?—supposing he were already at Ryde?"—

"*Why suppose?*—rather give attention to my proposals, to my entreaties!"

"We do not overtake your horse;—the servants must surely have gone on to the town?" said Mary, who was now becoming more and more uneasy; "and in a few minutes we shall be there!"

"Why should we *ever* reach it?" whispered

Marlay. "Accept my offers, profit by my counsels; and, instead of returning home, go on at once to Cowes. I will hasten to procure post horses and the attendance of your maid; and then—"

The carriage was at that moment proceeding leisurely up hill, and Mrs. Merstham, fancying that some person from the road had ascended into the vacant servant's seat behind, now hinted her apprehension to Marlay; who, from the increased darkness of the night, could but imperfectly examine the truth of her surmise. Pre-occupied by his projects, and caring little whether some idler had taken advantage of the footman's absence, he assured his companion that she was mistaken.

"No!—I could not be mistaken," replied Mary, half-rising from her seat to ascertain the fact.

"Indeed, indeed, you are. Sit down—compose yourself! Listen to me, dearest, dearest Mrs. Merstham: listen to him who, through life or death, swears—"

He was interrupted!—A singular sound

startled him into silence,—a click—as of the cocking of a pistol;—and lo! a ball whistled through the air between him and his companion, followed by the detonation of fire-arms close beside the carriage. The horses, which at that moment attained the summit of the hill leading into Ryde, instantly became ungovernable, and started at full speed; while Marlay's first impulse was to throw his arms round Mrs. Merstham to secure her from the impending danger. Uncertain whether she had been injured by the attempt of the assassin, he called aloud to her to answer him,—to assure him that she was unwounded. But Mary lay like a leaden weight upon his bosom, either dead or in a deep swoon; and Marlay, nothing doubting that the first obstacle encountered by the carriage would overturn it with violence, could only press her closely to his breast, and pray that if the shock were fatal to one, it might be falal to both.

Fortunately, the servant who was in waiting at the turnpike at the entrance of the town, perceived from a distance the carriage coming

at a furious rate towards him, and succeeded in stopping the horses; and while, during the pause that ensued, the coachman communicated to his companion that they had been shot at by a robber, Marlay continued to call aloud upon them for assistance to bear their still inanimate lady into the nearest habitation.

"Better go home at once, sir, if my missus is any ways hurt," was John's suggestion. "We shall be at home in five minutes!" and he was about to remount Marlay's horse, and precede them to the house.

Every moment was of vital importance; yet how necessary was it for Marlay to pause for reflection!—A horrible presentiment assured him that they had been assailed by no common robber, and that the attempt at assassination was the work of Merstham. Such an outrage could not be the feat of an ordinary highwayman. Aim had been taken from behind the carriage, and Marlay bade the servants examine whether any one was still concealed there. But the assassin had disappeared.

"Heaven direct me!"—ejaculated Marlay, when the servants again suggested that they should convey Mrs. Merstham home. "Perhaps even this momentary delay may have been fatal to her!" And, having commanded the coachman to drive to the hotel, and despatched the other servant in search of medical aid, he resolved at least to ascertain the worst ere he presented himself at Merstham's door.

It was in a strange apartment, therefore, that the unfortunate Mary opened her eyes, when gradually restored to consciousness; and her first exclamation of "Where am I?—let me be carried home—I *must* be taken home!" sufficed to prove to her anxious auditors that she had sustained no vital injury. At the expiration of five minutes, Henry Marlay, having received from the females in attendance an assurance that the lady was suffering only from the effects of terror, and recommended her to their utmost assiduities, proceeded with all speed towards the residence of Merstham.

His previous apprehensions were instantly

justified. Mrs. Stanley, apprized by the return of the footman to summon her to the hotel of all that had occurred, and now on the point of setting forth, admitted that her master had returned from his farm, had peremptorily obtained intelligence of the route taken by his wife, had quitted the house on foot, and was still absent.

"You must exert your influence, Mrs. Stanley, to prevent your lady returning to this fatal house," said Marlay, in a despairing voice, as he received this intelligence, while accompanying the woman back to the hotel. "Her life has unquestionably been attempted by this madman; should anything hereafter occur, we shall be responsible to our consciences for the event."

But, on their arrival at the hotel, their united eloquence proved ineffectual. Mrs. Merstham, to whom the events of the last two hours were alike a matter of confusion, insisted on being immediately removed. Ill as she was, and with a momentarily increasing indisposition, she felt that her own home was the proper place for

her; and, having claimed the escort of Dr. R——, the medical attendant summoned to her aid, bade a hasty adieu to Marlay, which served as a public interdiction to him to accompany her further.

With a heavy heart, he saw her enter the carriage;—he felt that he should behold her face no more!

CHAPTER X.

Prythee despatch!
The lamb entreats the butcher. Where's thy knife?
Thou art too slow when I desire it, too.
Cymbeline.

FIVE days after these direful events, as Lady Raymond was sitting in the darkened chamber of Mrs. Merstham, who was now pronounced to be nearly out of danger after the premature confinement produced by her terrors of mind and body, she was beckoned away by Sir Charles.

"What on earth shall we do?"—said he, as his wife followed him into the adjoining dressing room. "Merstham is arrived."

"Arrived,—actually in the house?—the servants have admitted him?"—

"Admitted him into his own house?—of course they have."

"And what do you mean to do, then, about having him secured?"

"On what grounds?—Merstham is as much in his senses as I am. I never saw a man more rational. And, as to Marlay's absurd idea about his having fired a pistol into his wife's carriage, poor Marlay, you know, is such an enthusiast, and so apt to imbibe wrong-headed notions."

"But how does Merstham account for his own proceedings—for his long absence?"

"Naturally enough; nothing can be more natural. Finding on his arrival at Culverfield that his lease-business required prompt reference to his London solicitors, he resolved to set off immediately for town; came home to make his preparations, found Mary absent, so that he had no opportunity of wishing her good bye; and, being anxious to save the London mail, crossed over at once to Portsmouth.

He has been all this time at an hotel in town, the house in Grosvenor Place being in so comfortless a condition; and expecting from day to day to get his business settled, did not think it necessary to write and apprize Mary, to whom he says he forwarded a note from Portsmouth on the night of his journey, which seems to have miscarried,"

"Mr. Merstham knew nothing, then, of what has been passing here during his absence?"—

"Not a syllable;—the announcement in last night's newspapers of the birth of a still-born child, was the first intelligence of poor Mary's illness that reached him. Of course he set off directly, travelled all night, looks dreadfully overcome, by the way, and now he is all anxiety to be admitted to his wife."

"Quite impossible at present!—the mere shock of knowing him to be in the house might prove fatal to her."

"Do you think so?—Why the idea that it was Merstham, who fired at her does not appear to have presented itself to her. It was only a vagary of poor Marlay."

"Did Merstham mention Marlay's name?"

"Not once."

"You did not tell him, then, that it was by Marlay we were informed of what had passed, and summoned to attend on Mrs. Merstham?"

"Of course not. He fancies Mary desired we might be sent for, and repeatedly thanked me for our ready compliance with her request."

"Well, if you really perceive nothing flighty about him, and think he has clearly exonerated himself from all suspicion about that horrid assassination affair—"

"Hush, my dear; be cautious I beg of you! It is so very serious a charge to make against a man!"

"Well, you know how positively Marlay asserted that—"

"Yes,—I know, I know!—But Marlay is a hot-headed, prejudiced young man, who will say anything. I see not the slightest grounds for inculpating poor Merstham."

"In that case, as I said before, I rejoice that he is come home. His arrival relieves us

from all responsability; and in a day or two Mary will be well enough to admit of our going back to Warley, which I shall be heartily glad of. It was very inconvenient to me to quit Warley just now. You know I am expecting the Glamorgans and the Dowager next week; and Helena writes me word that—"

"But what shall I say to Merstham?—He is waiting to come up."

"Let me go and speak to him in the drawing-room. He really cannot see Mary till she has been properly prepared for the interview."

"I was afraid of referring him to you in the first instance," observed Sir Charles; "I was afraid you might refuse to see him after all you had been hearing from Henry Marlay."

"But if you say that he is not mad, and that you are convinced he had no hand in the attack on his wife, what right have we to vilify his character? If every man who is jealous and morose, and does not live on good terms with his wife, were to pass for an assassin, I am sure—"

"Once more, let me entreat you, my dear, to be prudent. I am positively afraid of an interview between you and Merstham, unless you engage to be cautious. We are placed, you see, under very delicate circumstances; and a single rash word might produce the most disagreeable consequences."

"Of course;—what do you intend to do, therefore, about Marlay?"—

"Don't mention his name so loud. There can be no possible use in talking about him. I shall be off to the hotel as soon as you are closeted with Merstham, and advise Lady Mary to carry away her son from the Isle of Wight, as soon as possible."

"But if Henry Marlay does not choose to—"

"Hush, hush!—Merstham is perhaps on the stairs!—For Mary's sake, pray be more considerate!"—

And considerate as her nature would allow, Lady Raymond displayed herself in her first interview with her nephew-in-law; accepting

with due courtesy his reiterated thanks for her more than kinswomanly attendance upon his wife; and evincing the most complete faith in his history of his own movements and their motives. Nay, she was sincere in the conviction that, after all, Merstham's nature was more amiable than that of Mary;—for, while the mother expressed little regret at the still-birth of her infant, regarding it probably as rescued from a life of martyrdom, Merstham alluded to his recent loss in a tone of the most poignant sorrow; bewailing the child as though his whole hopes of happiness had been fixed upon its well-doing. The painful necessity still presented itself of apprizing Mrs. Merstham of her husband's arrival, and introducing him to her presence.

But the task proved easier than was anticipated; where hope is dead, fear ceases to exist. Mary, aware that her prospects of happiness were closed for ever, cared little what thunder-clouds might more or less darken her horizon. She was no longer at peace with herself,

So long as she had succeeded in excluding Henry Marlay from her presence, so long as her ears had been unassailed by avowals of his guilty love, she felt that she had a right to assert her own dignity, and defy the suspicions of Merstham. But now,—now that she had tacitly admitted her attachment for another,—the consciousness of innocence was gone! She could no longer sit in the centre, and enjoy clear day;—she was under a cloud in her own estimation, however brightly the favour of the world might shed its sunshine on her head. She felt that she must not resist; that her privilege of resentment was gone!—Henceforth, it became her to suffer and be silent!—

When, therefore, after a prodigious waste of circumlocution, Lady Raymond unfolded Mr. Merstham's request to be admitted to an interview, instead of bursting into the tears and hysterics apprehended by her aunt, poor Mary simply replied, "If he wishes to see me, I am ready to receive him whenever you please;" and as the Raymonds "pleased" that every-

thing should be accelerated as far as possible, in order to afford a pretext for their return to Warley, Merstham was without loss of time ushered to the bedside of the invalid. To avoid all danger of painful reminiscences, Lady Raymond thought proper to remain in the room during the first visit; promoting as much conversation as was permitted to Mary, by questioning Merstham concerning the estate at Culverfield, its value, extent, and cultivation. To listen to the queries of her scientific catechism a stranger might have supposed Lady Raymond to be a caballing candidate for one of the gold medals of the Agricultural Society!—

Profiting by the hint thus afforded, Merstham made it his cue to be cheerful, chatty, and conciliatory; and there was every appearance that after all that had passed,—after all that might have passed,—an armistice, if not a permanent peace, was likely to be established between the belligerents. Sir Charles was very shortly assured by his wife that all unpleasant feelings had ceased to exist between Mary and her Pacha.

"You must have greatly misunderstood all Mrs. Merstham said to you in London, which you or George so imprudently repeated to young Marlay," said she; "while Marlay himself must be out of his mind to fancy such atrocious things of poor Merstham. I never saw a kinder-hearted man, or one more attached to his wife; and, as to Mary's being afraid of him, Marlay might just as well assert that you were likely to be the death of *me*, because a little sparring occasionally takes place between us."

"I rejoice to hear you say so," observed Sir Charles. "I believe the best thing we can do is to leave them to make it up and make it out together. Nothing does so much harm between married people as the interference of friends; for we are all apt to fancy ourselves ill-used when we find people ready to adopt the notion of our being victims. Supposing, my dear, you were to make arrangements with Mrs. Merstham for leaving her early next week? It is all but indispensable for me to be back again at Warley by Tuesday next."

And, in this instance, as before, Mary was quiescent. She agreed with Lady Raymond that she was now sufficiently re-established to be left to Mrs. Stanley's care; and all was settled for the departure of her aunt and uncle. Merstham promised to give them frequent bulletins of his wife, and bring her to visit them in the course of the winter; and on the day he quitted the Isle of Wight, Sir Charles drove over to Cowes; and, after a long interview with Lady Mary Marlay, succeeded in persuading her that Henry was giving way to injurious self-delusions, and eventually engaged her to induce her son to quit the country, amuse himself by a cruise in Lord Ballitore's yacht, and for the future refrain from all interference with the Mersthams.

"Farewell, uncle!—Think of me sometimes by your happy fireside;—kindly, when you can, —indulgently always," faltered Mary, when Sir Charles, in taking leave of her, announced the victory he had obtained. "May you be happy when—"

" And you, my dear Mary!" he replied, imprinting a kiss upon her forehead.

" No," answered Mrs. Merstham, with a melancholy waive of the head, " it was not to be happy I was born !—But *my* probation is nearly at an end!"

CHAPTER XI.

Hope nothing, if I thus may speak,
To thee a woman, and thence weak.
Weep, if that aid thee, but depend
Upon no aid of outward friend;
Espouse thy doom at once, and cleave
To fortitude without reprieve.

The White Doe of Rylston.

ALL was mirth and gaiety at Warley Manor on the Raymonds' return; and Lady Raymond was almost startled by the contrast afforded by her own joyous, fearless, populous, sunshiny mansion, to Mary's sick chamber with its ner-

vous anxieties, muffled footsteps, and careful whispering. She flattered herself she was a pattern for aunts, to have devoted a whole fortnight of her cheerful autumn to so unsatisfactory an attendance.

Her children, meanwhile, rejoiced heartily in the tidings of Mary's recovery. Most of her cousins liked her as well as they liked anything but themselves; moreover, a death in the family accompanied with bombazine, broad hems, and the tedious decorum of deep mourning must interfere most unwelcomely with their pleasures. The shooting season would have been worth nothing at Warley, had the decease of Mrs. Merstham made war against its September battues.

It was now the turn of the happy Helena to have a Lord Glamorgan sighing at her feet, and Lady Raymond had the glorious prospect of getting rid of another daughter; while all the envious mammas of the neighbourhood were of opinion that there must be magic in the air of Warley, since the girls there made good matches as fast as they came out;—nay,

since even the cousin, who was little better than a poor relation and after all no great beauty, had been able to choose between Lord Ballitore's nephew and a man like Mr. Merstham of Grosvenor Place, with an estate in the Isle of Wight, a capital government appointment, and capital house in town. The latter case, however, was not without its qualifying "ifs" and "buts."

"Yes! it was all very well *if* the Raymonds approved such marriages," said a few of the ill-natured many. "*But* Mr. Merstham, who by the way was old enough to be Miss Mary's papa, had already lost his appointment, and might now find it difficult to keep up his house and establishment!" While a certain Miss Toadbolt (old Lady Glamorgan's soul in torment) who happened to be a Southamptonian, and had been affronted by being required to sleep in an attic during her second visit to Warley after the young Lord was secured in the family, circulated a whisper in the neighbourhood that "it was not every body who would have liked

to connect themselves with the Mersthams of Southampton; the old doctor having two brothers who had made away with themselves, besides a daughter in confinement. There was madness in every branch of the family."

These defamatory whispers, however, though deep, were not loud. Warley was one of the pleasantest staying-houses in that part of the country. George Raymond was a *parti*, and his brothers very agreeable young men; and, above all, Sir Charles was supposed to have the best pheasant-shooting of the county of Dorset. All the world, therefore, welcomed back Lady Raymond from the Isle of Wight, as if the light of her countenance was indispensable to the welfare of the neighbourhood; and all the world was as much delighted to learn "that poor Mrs. Merstham was doing as well as could be expected," as Henry Marlay himself might have been, had that vague conventional phrase conveyed any thing like conviction to his mind.

Nor was the sympathy of the Dorsetshire community decreased when the Raymonds resumed their two formal dinners per week, and sent out cards for an entertainment in honour of George's approaching birthday. On the 20th of September, five whole parishes were to eat, drink, and make merry for his sake. There was a rumour of grand preparations at Warley; and every friendly neighbouring family was eager to do honour to the occasion—when lo! on the 18th, a report gained ground that the ball was suddenly put off; and, on the following day, servants in the Raymond livery were seen traversing the five parishes in all directions, with notes of excuse announcing that, "in consequence of a death in the family, Sir Charles and Lady R. were deprived of the honour of receiving their friends, to-morrow evening, the 20th instant."

What could be more provoking!—so much white satin and blonde lace to be thrown away; and the expectation of an agreeable ball, so grievously disappointed! "Who could have died so inconveniently?—What relation

could the Raymond family have lost?—Or, was it all a pretext to evade the ball?—Under any circumstances, it was most inconsiderate of them to have issued invitations while a member of the family was seriously ill. On such occasions, some attention is due to the convenience of others."

All these murmurs were hushed, however, when it became known that the young and lovely Mary was the victim,—that the envied Mrs. Merstham, was actually no more;—and that Sir Charles and his eldest son were off in a chaise and four to attend the funeral. "Poor Mrs. Merstham!—Not yet twenty! How young to die,—and after how small a portion of the enjoyments of life!"—was now the general cry.

"Mary Raymond had always been so far the most amiable of the family; so affable, so obliging, so unassuming,—so different from the self-sufficient Mrs. Elwood and hoyden Juliana. The Manor had not been the same place after Mary's marriage. Since Mrs. Merstham quitted Warley, visitors had never found themselves

attended to with the same real and polite kindness. Yet, regardful as she was of the comfort of other people, there had always been something melancholy,—something depressed about her;—something indicative of those mysterious presentiments which seem to overcloud the minds of persons foredoomed to early death.—Poor, poor Mary Raymond!—To die at twenty,—perhaps of disappointment,—perhaps of a broken-heart. She deserved happier fate!"

If such the regrets of the mere neighbours of Warley Manor, what must have been the reflexions of George Raymond and his father, as they hastened towards the house of mourning!—The letter apprizing them of the sudden death of Mrs. Merstham had been despatched by her maid Stanley,—the bereaved husband being in too deep affliction to write; and stated that the event was wholly unexpected,—that her mistress, who was almost convalescent, had been carried off by a spasmodic attack,—and that her master had scarcely spoken since the event.

"We shall learn more of all this, on reaching Ryde," was the remark of Sir Charles when, in the course of their journey, his son ventured to allude to the vague nature of the communication, and the suspicions already entertained by Marlay. "Ignorant as we are of every particular, it would be most unjust to prejudge the case."

"Nevertheless," replied George, who was sincerely affected by the loss of the gentle object of his earliest preference, "if any doubt should attach itself to the mode of Mary's death,—if the medical men should express—"

"Make yourself easy," gravely interrupted his father. "Every inquiry shall be made,—every circumstance sifted,—every respect paid to the memory of my brother's daughter."

And insensibly Sir Charles relapsed into the train of meditation into which he had fallen concerning the mournful destinies of his niece and her unfortunate parents!—Again, his high-spirited brother, the kind, cordial, playmate of his youth, seemed to stand before him, full of energy, full of heart,—instinct

with strength and vigour that promised length of days.—Again, Sir Charles, pictured to himself the new-made grave, beside which, a few short months after marriage, he supported the bride of George Raymond, when his body, cast upon the shore by the billows in which he perished, was assigned to consecrated earth.—Again, Sir Charles fancied himself hanging over the deathbed of that young and beautiful widow, whose feeble arms were upraised for the last time, to place within his own, the orphan of his brother! The plaintive cry of that sickly infant again seemed to reach his ear and touch his heart, in a manner which no infant's cry had exercised before or since over his feelings. No! *not one* of his own children had ever appealed in its helplessness so strongly to his heart, as the poor little Mary Raymond, for whom his protection was implored by the faltering voice of a dying mother!—

He recalled the girl to mind, in all her after-years of dutiful dependence. How often, when he was ill and peevish, and his own

children fled from his sick chamber, *she* had tarried beside him to read, to write, to converse, or be silent as he commanded! He could not remember a single instance of ungraciousness or disobedience in his niece. He had warned her against accepting the assiduities of George; and, from that moment, she had avoided all intercourse with her cousin; he had forbidden her to encourage the attentions of his son Richard's necessitous friend, and she had refrained from further intimacy with Marlay;—nay, he had only to hint to her that she would relieve him and his family from a heavy burthen by becoming the wife of Merstham, and she had thrown herself away unmurmuring. Had he not reason to admire the duteousness of such a ward;—had he not reason to sorrow over her untimely end?—

But was this all?—Was there no self-reproach mingled with his sorrow?—Had he nothing neglected,—nothing wronged her? Could he still justify the choice of Merstham for her husband: or even the inconsiderate

carelessness with which he had fulfilled her commission in the communication made to Marlay ?—Might not,—(he scarcely dared to think of it!) might not his rashness on that occasion have proved the remote cause of her death ?—

It was night when the travellers reached Portsmouth,—a soft moonlight night; and the tide serving for the passage, Sir Charles complied with the suggestions of his son that they should cross to the island without delay. At any other period, both father and son must have been struck by the beauty and tranquillity of the sea-scene as they quitted the harbour, where every object was visible as at noonday. But both were now too painfully absorbed to dwell upon the aspect of external nature. As they drew near the place where they had last beheld her, Mary was with them almost visibly!—They seemed to hear her voice, to see her gentle face, her gentle gestures,—how sweetly in accordance with the pure and heavenly stillness of the atmosphere around!—Yes! The moonlit sea,

the moonlit sky, appeared arrayed in their utmost loveliness, to rejoice with the released spirit which had suffered so much and so patiently in its bondage of clay !—

As they steered towards the shore of Ryde, and the fragrance of its gardens became perceptible, George Raymond involuntarily shuddered at the consciousness that he was drawing near the spot where *the body* of her they lamented was lying. On the wide sea, Mary seemed re-united to them in softness, beauty, and happiness; while Merstham's house must necessarily associate them anew with notions of suffering and sorrow, and all the vulgar meannesses of an inferior nature. He would have given much not to enter those detested doors;—but it was a sacrifice due to propriety and the memory of the departed.

Yet heaven knows there was nothing gloomy in the aspect of the place. The moonlight was sleeping upon its white walls as calmly, and the flowers on the little lawn sent up their incense as zealously, as if all were happiness within !

"I will acquaint my master that you are come, Sir," said the servant who opened the door to the untimely visitors,—in that portentous whisper which seems to indicate the presence of the dead.

"No, do not disturb him at present," replied Sir Charles, in the same subdued tone. "Pray how *is* Mr. Merstham?"

"My master keeps his own room, Sir; we do not see him. But he is quite quiet and composed, I fancy," replied the man.

"Can I speak with Stanley?"

"Certainly, Sir. Perhaps you will step into the drawing room? There is no person in the drawing-room."

"No," interrupted George Raymond, attempting to overcome his emotions, "show us up at once into the room."

"Into the room with the corpse, Sir?" inquired the man in the coarse dialect of those of his degree. "Hadn't you better——"

"Do as you are bid," again interrupted George. "You know us, I believe?—Sir Charles Raymond and his son."

"Oh! yes, Sir—I know you perfectly, Sir, I beg ten thousand pardons,—only I thought,—Sir, if you please, I will call Mrs. Stanley."

And Stanley having made her appearance, in a few minutes they followed the poor heart-broken waiting maid into Mary's chamber;—with its solemn tapers burning—and its solemn stillness prevailing—cold and heavy as the stillness of the sepulchre!

"I am very, very glad you are come Sir Charles," whispered Stanley, as they approached the condemned door. "I was sure you would wish to see my poor dear lady for the last time."

A cold chill crept through the frame of George as they crossed the threshold. So completely was his mind absorbed by the idea that Mary had come unfairly by her end, that he dreaded to look upon her face: dreaded to see her countenance distorted, or to trace the marks of violence upon her person. He hung back,—he averted his face,—he dared not approach the coffin, at the foot

of which his father had reverently bent his knee.

"Do not be afraid, Mr. Raymond," sobbed the attendant; "she looks as placid and sweet, poor lady, as she used when she was living!"—

And thus encouraged, George cast his eyes upon the cold, inanimate face which "was as it were the face of an angel;" and his sorrow was soothed by the aspect of its unearthly,—pure,—triumphant smile, and that superhuman tranquillity of repose which the storms and tumults of the world avail no further to disturb.

"She looks all for one as if she were asleep," ejaculated the servants, in the conventional phrase of such occasions. But George felt deeply otherwise. The close clinging plaited shroud, — the narrow coffin,—the stiffened form,—the extended hands which he dared not raise to his lips, were not the array of sleep.—These were the characters of death. Death—death alone—assumes that cold and ghastly formality!

"Were you with my niece when she died?"—inquired Sir Charles Raymond as he wiped away the tears that had been falling in silence from his eyes.

"No, Sir, no one was with her but Mr. Merstham. My mistress was seized in the night, Sir, with a sort of convulsion; and, before help could be procured, she breathed her last. It was towards morning, I was called up by the butler who slept just above my lady's room, and was woke up, by a loud scream—a loud, loud cry—but whether it were my poor lady's, or from the lips of my master when he found her dead, I can't take upon me to say. So we knocked at the door, and getting no answer, found our way in, Sir; and there sat Mr. Merstham in a chair beside the bed, like a man out of his senses; with my mistress lying quite dead and almost cold. For a moment, indeed, we hoped it might be only a fainting fit, and so I sent off one of the men for Doctor R."

"And Mr. Merstham offered no opposition?"—interrupted George."

"Lord bless you, Sir, he took not the least notice of what was going on. And the medical gentlemen came, and tried to bleed her, but no blood flowed; and they said she must have died in a fit,—probably from the rupture of a blood vessel in her heart, or head. They wanted Mr. Merstham to quit the room, but master would not stir. There he sat like a statue, while I laid out the body, and even when the undertaker came. Every body said it was not proper for him to be there at such a time; but how were we to force him away?—So he remained fixed in the room, Sir, till about two hours ago; when, after we had moved my poor lady into her coffin and settled with the men that it was to be closed at morning, he crept away into his own apartment. It is to be hoped, poor man, that he has laid down to rest."

"You observed no particular appearances about the body?" inquired Sir Charles, in a hesitating manner, as if overpowered by the delicate tendencies of such a question.

"*Appearances*, Sir Charles?"

"My father means—" added Mr. Raymond, then paused as if unable to express himself further.

"There were no spots—no bruises—no—"

"Spots?—oh! dear no, Sir, my poor lady was always fair and white as a lily. For an hour or two after death, indeed, there was a sort of purplish hue in the face, which Dr. R. said is always so in cases of sudden death."

"There ought to have been,—there ought still to be an inquest held," said Raymond, sternly and steadily.

"A coroner's inquest held upon my poor lady, just as if she had made away with herself?—Oh! Sir, oh!—Mr. Raymond!—surely you won't think of it!" cried Stanley, really shocked.

"*I* see no grounds for proposing such a measure," observed Sir Charles. "Medical attendance was called in,—proper precautions were taken. There has been no attempt at secresy,—no indecent haste."

"But after our preceding motives for suspicion?"

"Look at the heavenly stillness of that countenance," observed the elder kinsman, "and you will not for a moment persist that it is the countenance of a person having suffered a violent death. A sleeping child does not wear a calmer expression."

And George, unversed in similar appearances, found nothing to reply to his father's arguments.

"Before we visit Merstham in the morning," resumed Sir Charles, following the waiting-woman into an adjoining room, "we will confer more at large with the medical men who were called in. Should they assign natural causes for poor Mary's death, (who, when we left her was certainly much exhausted in constitution by her recent shock,) we should be unjustifiable in casting a stigma upon Merstham's character, of which he is perhaps as undeserving as you or myself."

"Good heavens, Sir!"—cried Stanley, "Mr.

Raymond surely don't fancy that my poor lady was——"

"Hush, hush!—calm yourself my good woman!"—interrupted Sir Charles.

"Oh! dear, dear Sir!—the very idea puts me beside myself.—To think that Mr. Merstham, who was struck down by the sad event, for all the world as if a blow had fallen on him,—who has neither eaten nor drank since,—who is so altered, too"—

"Let me beg of you to be silent," reiterated Sir Charles; "no charge is made against your master, or any one else; and——"

"I'm sure, Sir, 'tis not for any love of Mr. Merstham I speak," persisted the woman, too much excited to be readily pacified; "for a more disagreeable, meaner gentleman, no person ever served. But justice opens my mouth. I am free to own, indeed, to his being passionate enough at times, and apt to fly out against my poor lady without any provocation that I could see. But his passion never went further than a threatening look or a few angry words; and——"

"You *have* observed threatening looks, then?"—cried George Raymond.

"Not more than are apt to pass between any married gentleman and lady of hasty tempers," said Stanley. "I was a whole twelvemonth with poor Mrs. Merstham, Sir, and could swear upon an affidavit that I never heard her make a complaint, as I must have done had she been badly treated. But as to supposing any one capable of putting her out of the way——"

"Not another word on the subject, I beg; you are completely under a mistake!" said Sir Charles Raymond, in a peremptory voice, as he prepared to quit the room. "My son and myself sleep to-night at the hotel. In the morning, you will be so good as to acquaint Mr. Merstham of our arrival and inquire at what hour he wishes to see us."

And, as if to escape all further discussion of the frightful subject, he abruptly led the way out of the house.

CHAPTER XII.

Oh! ill starr'd wench,
Pale as thy smock!—When we shall meet at compt
This look of thine will hurl my soul from Heav'n
And fiends will snatch at it!— Cold, cold, my girl,
Even like thy chastity!

Shakspeare.

AWARE of the timid and vacillating nature of his father's disposition, George Raymond prepared himself before their arrival at Ryde to see Sir Charles palter with conviction, become the slave of circumstances, evade all active examination into the mysteries connected with Mary's sudden death, and perhaps eventually range himself on the side of Merstham. It afforded him therefore less surprise than mortification when he perceived

that the vague testimony borne by the medical men to the causes of her decease, on the morning after their arrival, was received and adopted with avidity.

The surgeon called in at the moment of her death seemed chiefly intent on assuring her family that every thing had been tried for her restoration, and tried in vain; and Dr R.—— the physician previously in attendance, admitted that Mrs. Merstham was in so delicate a state of health and so excited a state of nerves, that any great crisis was likely to have proved fatal; both choosing to encumber their surmises respecting the immediate cause of her demise with such a weight of technical terms and professional wisdom, that the unilluminated auditors were soon lost in perplexity. Sir Charles protested, however, that nothing could be more clear than the statements laid before him, nothing more satisfactory; and, while George Raymond continued to question, cross-question, hint and infer, the thousand horrid doubts agitating his mind,—the morning gradually wore away.

At length, with as much delicacy as such a proposition would admit, Mr. Raymond explicitly requested that an examination of the body might take place: when the professional expositors, (by no means anxious for a measure which might tend to expose the fallacy of their learned opinions), set forth in glaring colours that the step not having been taken in the first instance by the husband, but at the eleventh hour and at the desire of Mrs. Merstham's family, would tend to cast imputations upon themselves and the unfortunate widower such as no pre-existing circumstances appeared to authorize. This judgment was fully confirmed by Sir Charles; who expressed himself perfectly satisfied by the statements laid before him that his niece had fallen a victim to convulsions, incident to her exhausted state of health and the irritation of her nervous system.

At the entreaty of his son, he consented, however, that the medical men should accompany them to Merstham's house and tender theproposal for examination, as for their own

satisfaction, and all four immediately set forth together; when George Raymond, overcome by the emotions excited by the discussion in which they had been engaged, could scarcely forgive his father for the ease with which he entered into desultory conversation with the strangers, on their way to such a house on such an errand.

The unfortunate Merstham was seated in his own apartment, when, by previous arrangement, they were introduced together; nor did he raise his eyes on their entrance, or give the slightest token of consciousness of their presence. He appeared stupified by grief, or overworn with watching; and on his hard sullen face was a beard of four days' growth, to increase the natural severity of its expression. After a few inquiries after his health, and general condolences to which he deigned no reply, Sir Charles left to Dr. R—— an opportunity for his proposal; having peremptorily exacted of his son that he would refrain from all interference in whatever discussions might ensue.

Endowed with considerable suavity of address, the Doctor displayed great tact in the sophistries of phrase polite, in which he contrived to envelope all that was calculated to give umbrage to the husband, in the measure he was required to propose.

Mr. Raymond's eyes remained steadily fixed on the countenance of Merstham, while Dr. R—— attempted to make his meaning as little plain as possible; but the louring brow of the mourner gave no sign that he either heard or understood; and again when the work of eloquence was re-commenced with similar pains and labour, and similar lack of effect,—he answered not a word! A glance of intelligence now passed between the bland physician and Sir Charles Raymond, implying "the poor man is overpowered by despair, and incapable of attending to us; let us leave him to himself;" when George Raymond, forgetful of his promise or unable to control his feelings, suddenly quitted his chair and confronting Merstham, sternly exclaimed, "We are come, Sir, to request your sanction to a professional

examination, with a view to elucidate the causes of my cousin the late Mrs. Merstham's untimely decease."

"You have it, gentlemen," replied Merstham, without raising his eyes from the ground.

"Not if the measure be in any degree painful to you, my dear Sir,"—added Sir Charles.—"God forbid that poor Mary's family should do any thing to aggravate your sufferings."

"God forbid!" repeated Merstham with the same mechanical insensibility.

"But having been favoured with your permission," persisted George, "it only remains to———"

"Mr. Merstham has of course as much interest as yourself in ascertaining the causes of his and our bereavement," interrupted Sir Charles. "It will be better, therefore, for himself to point out the persons he wishes to be called in, and ———"

"I have already said, fulfil your own pleasure, gentlemen!—I can do no more!"—said Merstham, in a hollow voice. "Call in whom

you will,—the whole town of Ryde, if you find gratification in such exposures.—I have no further option in the subject."

"There will be no exposure, my dear Sir," interposed the mild physician. "Rely upon me, that all shall proceed in the most regular and ordinary method: taking upon myself to render you a report of the information we may deduce from the exercise of our most painful duty."

But Merstham lent a careless eye and ear to these professional assiduities. Again, he had relapsed into sullen silence; nor was it till Dr. R——. re-commenced one of his florid harangues that he abruptly observed, "Complete your arrangements elsewhere; I have nothing more to hear or to reply." And straightway commenced a sort of rocking movement upon his chair, as if to soothe down his impatience of their officious importunities;—a hint upon which all parties felt compelled to quit the room.

But what was the irritation of Raymond to learn from Mrs. Stanley immediately after leaving Merstham's presence, that during their

delays and discussion, the coffin had been soldered up for ever!—

"Nothing can be easier than to have it opened!"—was his first indignant exclamation. "'Tis a thing that has frequently been done in similar cases."

"Only under circumstances of great suspicion," observed the surgeon.

"Nothing but urgent necessity can ever warrant the disturbance of the dead," added Dr. R——. "To unsolder a coffin is a work of difficulty, and the attempt would give rise to a thousand painful rumours."

"I, for my own part, will sanction nothing of the kind," said Sir Charles, in a more positive tone. "There is no plea, no pretext, for it! The ready acquiescence of Merstham in our wishes, is a proof of his innocence: and since, most unfortunately, the examination did not occur in the first instance, let us not be instrumental in molesting the remains of my poor niece for the gratification of our own susceptibility. I shall immediately acquaint Mr. Merstham with my determination; then

leave the house till to-morrow, when I understand from Stanley the funeral is to take place."

And having cast a hurried glance upon the coffin now hidden beneath its pall and surmounted by the customary lid of nodding plumes, Sir Charles with moistened eyes quitted for ever the fatal apartment; cheerfully followed by the medical men, and most reluctantly by his son. George Raymond alone re-entered with his father the chamber in which Merstham was seated. He desisted from his rocking movement as they drew near, and when Sir Charles observed, "Having found the last melancholy operations up stairs already concluded, the coffin soldered and fastened down, it appears to me inexpedient to create unnecessary disturbance to the sacred remains." George Raymond was almost startled by the sudden gleam of triumphant cunning, of irrepressible exultation, that brightened the countenance of Merstham.

"You have judged rightly," he murmured,

in a hoarse, hollow, voice. "You neglected poor Mary as a child, and injured her as a woman;—'tis as well not to persecute her as a corpse.—It were a bitter jest that Sir Charles Raymond took more heed of his dead niece than he was ever known to do while she was alive."

To resent the ravings of a half frantic man would have been absurd: and Mary's uncle and cousin quitted the room in silence, lest the offensive rebuke should be repeated. They encountered Merstham but once again;—even on the brink of the grave, when ashes were re-committed to ashes, and dust to dust.

* * * * *

But was that chamber in truth a fatal chamber? Had its walls indeed echoed to the stifled groans of the murdered, to the cry of a victim's dying anguish?—Had those lips, to which the relaxation of after death imparted so soft an expression, been previously distorted by the pangs of a violent end?—Had they called aloud for aid,—aloud for mercy, and in vain?—Had they faltered a res-

ponse to the admonitory question,—"*Desdemona! have you pray'd to-night?*"

That secret rests with the Almighty!—But in a private asylum for the reception of lunatics, at Southampton, there exists an unhappy patient who for years has sat rocking himself upon a chair; incessantly muttering between his teeth, "I baffled them all,—I baffled them all!—I cheated the lover,—I cheated the uncle,—I cheated the proud, insolent, overbearing family!—I shut her up in her coffin and secured her from them for ever.—And now she is mine again,—now she is mine. Are you not mine, Mary?—answer me child, are you not mine?—She can't answer!—she groans,—She does not speak,—there is blood in her mouth,—hide it,—close up the coffin,—don't say I did it,—don't say I strangled her!—No, no, never tell them how I managed to make you my own again,—Mary,—Mary,—Mary."—

These incoherent cries and a solitary gravestone in the village churchyard of Bonchurch

in the Isle of Wight, are all that remain to testify of the destinies of Merstham's wife.—Within a year of her decease, Henry Marlay's name was included in the list of the slain at Navarino; George Raymond was wedded with another; and none are left to mourn for her or revive the question of her death.

Weep, nevertheless, ye children, heretofore ungrateful for the blessing of parental protection;—tremble, ye parents, who would recklessly confide to others the guardianship of your children;—while you ponder over the twenty years of sorrow and suffering included in the fate of MARY RAYMOND!

THE ABBEY.

A MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM.

Lament, lament old Abbies,
The fairies' lost command!
BISHOP CORBET.

THE ABBEY.

CHAPTER I.

In old time of the King Artour
All was this land fulfilled of Faerie.
The Elf-Queen with her jolly company
Danced full oft in many a grene mede,
This was the old opinion as I rede.
I speak of many hundred years ago,
But now can no man see no elves mo.

Chaucer.

Alas! for the days of Faery!—Alas! for the fatal fact, that since new worlds have been added to the old, and "perilous regions of thick-ribbed ice" familiarly laid open to our ken, the "land of thought" has disappeared! Dwarfs and giants are no longer creatures of the imagination, but people of fairs and show booths. The word Sylph presents nothing

more etherial than Taglioni to our mind's eye; and lo!—at the name of Gnome uprises some leathern-vested unshapeliness with pickaxe and shovel, as from the trap-doors of the Surrey theatre. Even our beau ideal of the frosty Caucasus, with its associations of Mangraby, the caverns of the Afrits and Solomon's seal, is destroyed for ever by the meagre copper-plate views of some modern quarto;—Sir Tickleson Nickleson's "Peep into Persia," or "The Rev. Peter Popabout's bird's eye view of the Holy Land." If the days of chivalry are past, the days of illusion have also ceased to exist.

Mournfully and touchingly does Wordsworth's sonnet deplore the departure of the gods, and tender are the poet's aspirations after the sight of "old Triton and his wreathed horn." But what would it be to recall for a season our days of childish simplicity (the true age of gold,) when the Blue Bird was something better than a macaw; and Blue Beard, more than a fancy edition of the Reis Effendi; when the *Croque Mitaine*, who allegorically devoured Red Rid-

ing Hood figured as a four-legged wolf; and the "Open sesame" of the Arabian tale, as a more potent spell than aught of Rothschildian invention? What would it not be to find new faith for the voyages of Sindbad as for the travels of naturalist Waterton; or as deep-seated a horror of the old man of the sea as of that everlasting modern bore whom his tediousness was intended to typify!

What would it not be if natural magic could for a time be reconstructed into the skyey influences of preternatural agency; if chemistry could be re-conjured into her crucible, geology re-interred by the swart spirits of the mine, and all the phenomena of nature re-enveloped in their pristine mystery;—if that which now overcomes us like a summer cloud were to assume once more the terrors of necromancy, and the gossamer hang anew upon the evening air a tissue of unearthly enweavement.—But, alas! for the days of faery!—Alas! that the only wands of enchantment left in the nineteenth century should be those of the Usher of the black rod, and the silver stick in waiting!

But is it the material world alone that has been despoiled of its illusions by the discoveries of modern science?—Has the mind of man lost nothing of its alchemic wonders,—the heart of woman forfeited nothing of its charms by the operation of that thirst after the positive, which breaks a butterfly upon a wheel to pry into its organization?—Have not the quondam idols of our imagination been taken to pieces like the models of an anatomical museum;—do we not analyse and decompose our own sentiments and those of others, till nothing but a heavy caput mortuum remains;—nay, do we not even expose the mighty dead to the influence of our scientific investigation, till, having directed a galvanic battery upon the resuscitated victim, we clap our hands for joy to see its legs quiver and its lungs expand with the artificial existence of our creation! Man delights us no longer, nor woman either. "By the Lord! we know them as well as he who made them." They have been weighed in our balances and found wanting; admeasured by our compasses, and discovered to be pigmies.

Our knowledge of the world and its ways is infinite; but our eyes, ears, and understandings are disenchanted of all the sweeter illusions of life.—Alas! alas! for the spells of Faery!

It was on a mild but over-clouded day in autumn within the earlier half of the last century, that two youths of noble appearance, each bearing on his shoulder the paraphernalia bespeaking a disciple of old Izaak, were seen toiling across the country from the sea coast towards the most westernly of the lakes of Cumberland. Wastwater, sullen, secluded, unfathomable Wastwater, alienated from the brighter regions of that land of hill and dale by a ridge of rugged or inaccessible mountains, appeared to be the object of their pilgrimage; for ever and anon their eyes were bent inquiringly upon the misty eminence of Sty Head, and the cloud-enshrouded heights of Sca Fell, as if to ascertain what further wilds still interposed between them and the lonely mountain lake.

All around was ruggedness and desolation;

—no bordering woods, no gladsome verdure; —not even a hedge-row overgilded with the yellow tints of autumn. Arid plains of stubble proved indeed that the land had its cultivators, and that its scanty product was somewhere or other farmed and treasured. But scarcely a hovel was visible. The rude stone walls forming landmarks of possession, seemed to have grown spontaneously out of the soil. The scene was the abode of Solitude;—not the mildly pleasing hermit haunting apart from mankind to commune unmolested with the holiness of nature; but rather that wild, distracted, care-crazed, briar-crowned Tom o' Bedlam, who

> With presented nakedness outfaces
> The winds and persecutions of the sky!

At some distance, however, closely enskirting the western shore of Wastwater, and surmounted in the landscape by the scaurs and mountain steeps that serve to shut out the lake from all access to civilized life, was seen a verdant belt of plantations; as though one portion

at least of the valley was favoured as the resort of human kind. Thither, the two travellers directed their steps, hoping to preface their sport by rest and refreshment; and

> Wilds immeasurably spread
> Seemed lengthening as they went!

Nevertheless, they pushed valiantly onward. Their attire, at once simple and sportsmanlike, consisted in short tunics of dark grey cloth, with caps of the same humble material; and it was only the grace of their aspect, their gay freedom of demeanour and fine frank openness of countenance, that inferred them to be of higher degree than the sons of Whitehaven burgesses, occasionally engaged in sylvan sports in those rude and sequestered dales.

Nor was that nameless air of nobility a lying indication. Both were of lofty descent; but though, as the phrase runs, brothers of the angle, neither brothers in blood nor even distant kinsmen. The taller of the two was addressed by his companion by the name of Cecil;

the other appeared to bear the name of Claude; and they jested familiarly together on a thousand topics as they trudged along, more especially Cecil,—who was loud in his predictions that they should repent their expedition which could not choose but prove a fool's errand at so advanced a period of the year.

"I foresee how it will be!" cried he, when at length they reached a thicket of alder bushes on the outskirts of the green oasis which gave token that they were approaching the lake. "You forced me hither from Whitehaven,—compelled me to rest last night in a Cumbrian hovel, which it was your pleasure to call a farm house,—and now drive me onwards into the wilderness with as heavy a sky over our heads as will serve to flood the country between this and Egremont,—on pretext of seeking sport, where sport never yet was found, in this same bottomless lake, which we shall reach I presume, somewhere about Candlemas; but in reality to afford you the satisfaction of traversing a terra incognita which your pride whispers at every step you stumble, was bestowed upon

one of your Anglo-Saxon ancestors, by way of affording him wherewithal to piece his shirt of mail worn out in warring against the Picts! Prythee, Claude, how was he styled, this doughty hero of the north—was he a Leofric, or a Ceorcil, or a Torquil, or a——"

"It matters little, even to myself," cried Claude, striving to throw off the air of vexation which for a moment overspread his fine face, "since neither stick nor stone of the estate, (and i'faith its timber is somewhat stickish of stature, and its soil fertile of sandstone!) remains at present to the family. It is a legend, indeed among our people, that as far as a horse could pace in a day between Wastdale and the sea, was once our property. But my uncle Giles, like a rake as he was, sent his acres rattling through the dice-boxes at White's. He chose to be a gay town gentleman, and sport away the inheritance of his fathers with Wharton and his crew of wits and profligates; and, at the moment of his ruin, all his northern property, not included in the deed of entail, was

sold to the highest bidder and parcelled off in farms."

"No great matter of lamentation. Your family does not seem to have been at any time seated in this part of the country; and lands without house or home, held by some never seen proprietor, affix no particular interest to the soil. The people are happier to be neighboured by Gaffer and Gammer Gurton, who plough their own land and fatten their own beeves, than by some lord in tinsel and buckram who bows away his life two hundred miles off, at the levee of Sir Robert or Sir Robert's master! As far as *you* are concerned, (if the matter of the entail in any way concerns you) accept my congratulations that this Torquil or Tanaquil did not see fit to establish his house for ever in this ultramontane district—sans roads, sans towns, sans christian-like habitations, sans everything! I would not pass a year in so savage a Goshen for the world!"

"A year is a long time to pass in any seclud-

ed spot, even when it is overflowing with milk and honey."

"Say rather with claret and venison pasties,—for such is the diet my hungry stomach at this moment craveth," cried Cecil. "But, in good time, yonder among the bushes, I discern the gleaming of the silver thread that soon widens into the lake of Wastwater; the which, saving its presence, I have heard likened unto the Dead Sea, for any good that is to be found in its waters or upon its borders;—and, having toiled thus far for the pleasure or pain of throwing a line into it, 'tis most likely we shall find neither boats to launch in, nor on this valley-side footing or foundation; and so, like Marlbrook in the song——"

"You are mistaken, you are mistaken!" cried Claude, pushing onwards, and gaining sight of the rising green knolls and clear sedgeless banks of the lake towards its Wastdale limits. "I see a skiff moored to the stump near yonder cabin."

"No matter;—old Sca-fell has got on his

nightcap. I espy a coming storm which will render skiff and lake alike impracticable. These ruts and cart-tracts doubtless indicate something that in wilderness-dialect calls itself a road. Let us follow it to the nearest farm—beg, buy, or appropriate to ourselves shelter and refreshments—then, make our way across the country to Egremont, whence we may find conveyance back to Whitehaven, and run no further danger from delay. Had I deemed that the lake lay at so great a distance, I had seen it dried up ere I adventured the loss of a second night's rest."

"Farmhouse unluckily, there is none, in sight;" cried Claude, laughing heartily at the growing petulance of his companion. "But here comes the rain at your service;" and they had just time to scramble towards a sand-bank overgrown by the gnarled branches of a venerable holly tree, upon which the shower soon pelted with the violence characteristic of a mountainous district; rattling, as Cecil ob-

served, like a shower of shot upon a suit of Milan armour.

" I should be sorry to find myself up yonder among the roaring storms that envelope Sty-Head," exclaimed Claude, in the same reckless tone; " we are well esconced here."

" Well?" retorted his angry friend; " with every chance of being wet to the skin, during our thirty miles walk; but without the slightest hope of finding so much as an oatmeal cake to appease our hunger! Honour bright, Claude, my man, I have had all but enough of these mad-brained adventures, which have nothing chivalresque, or picturesque, or sportsmanesque about them. Pass for the encounter of danger;—but the encounter of discomfort is a bore!"

" How like two stone-chatterers we look, croaking under this reeking hollybush!" exclaimed Claude, still making light of their grievances. " What a pitiful figure we cut! and how lucky that no Marplot is at hand to espy our plight, and tell it in Gath, or at Christchurch."

But, at that moment, as if in disproval of his assertion, the sound of an approaching horse assailed their ears; and immediately came cantering along the strip of turf bordering the far side of the road, a well built mountain pony mounted by, what at first sight appeared a page —at second sight, a woman,—and at third, an angel!—

> A lovely apparition sent
> To be a moment's ornament;
> A dancing shape, an image gay
> To haunt, to startle and waylay!

Long light tresses escaped from a black velvet cap, lay upon the green vest and skirting, in which the beautiful equestrian was apparelled, —tresses such as they had a right to suppose would have floated in ringlets, had the weather been more auspicious; but not even the torrents of rain streaming on that lovely face had power to destroy the exquisite but mellow softness of complexion which lent so speaking a grace to the features. A moment—and the vi-

sion was gone!—leaving it to the two sportsmen to express their wonderment, so soon as they might recover breath and self-possession for the effort.

CHAPTER II.

What aspect bore the man who roved or fled
First of his tribe to this dark dell, and first
In this pellucid water slaked his thirst?
What hopes came with him—what designs were spread
Along his path? His unprotected bed
What dreams encompassed? Was the intruder nursed
In hideous usages and rites accursed?

The Duddon.

HALF hidden in one of the most "bosky bournes" adjoining the lake of Wastwater, just where a silver brooklet which frets its way from the mountain ridge above, finds issue into the lake, may be traced peeping between the thickets of dwarf ash and privet, a decayed boundary wall, overtopped by a straggling plan-

tation of larches and chestnuts, surmounted in their turn at rare intervals by the giant skeletons of a few super-centuried oaks, such as were perhaps saplings when the edicts of the Eighth Harry assigned them, with the soil in which they flourished, to other than monastic proprietorship. Gate of entrance seemed there none; though the decayed wall showed more than one fissure which might have served all purposes of admission to the enterprising adventurer.

Nevertheless, the two young fishermen had busied themselves for some time, with little effect, in seeking out an entrance. Having discussed with due fervour and eloquence the miraculous manifestation of the fair horsewoman of Wastdale, they decided, that unless, like the weird women of Forres, a bubble of the earth, she might probably be heard of by following the road she had taken, as far as the nearest habitation. Upstarted they, accordingly, from their lair under the hollybush; and, though the rain was still pouring, and the lightning flashing, pursued their way along the beaten

tract till it ended suddenly at a gate overgrown with nettles, docks, and scorpion-grass, which had evidently remained unopened for years. Eager in their pursuit, however, they persevered in following the outskirts of the wall, hoping to discern some other mode of ingress; till at length, unsuccessful and despairing, the elder of the two, throwing his encumbering fishing basket on the steaming grass, in spite of wind and weather, storm gusts and showers, climbed to the summit of the wall, resolved to determine what manner of domicile lay concealed within.

"Well?"—cried the impatient Claude, so soon as his friend Cecil, having attained a point where the plantation was thinnest, looked down upon the scene below; "what kingdoms of the earth do you discern from your pinnacle?"

"An everlasting kingdom, my dear fellow!"

"And of course worth scaling to see?"—

"I prythee do not mock me, fellow student!"

"No traces, of a habitation?"—

"Of a thousand!"

"Too many, by nine hundred and ninety-nine!—You will not stimulate my curiosity by rhodomontading."

"A thousand family mansions, as I am a christian man!—'Tis a churchyard!"

"And what beyond?—I swear our beauty was a creature of flesh and blood. Do you mean to tell me that she is lodged in some old mausoleum?—What beyond?"—

"Another wall, and another range of trees, concealing probably the church to which this agreeable pleasure ground belongs. So out of the way with you! that I may drop down again!—Tomb-gazing when a fellow, is drenched to the skin, is but a rheumatic recreation!"

And, having clambered down, and shaking the wet from his garments, the unsuccessful adventurer proposed that they should retrace their steps, and make for the nearest cottage.

"So soon discouraged?" cried Claude. "'Tis now my turn then to shine an ascending star; wait for me."

In a moment he had attained the sum-

mit of the wall, and, catching hold of the branch of an oak that extended itself over the ridge, was out of sight before his friend could make conditions.

" He will be back, anon," murmured Cecil, ensconcing himself, so as to obtain shelter weatherward of the wall. But the minutes wore away, and vague as was the adverb by which he had thought proper to limit his expectancy, " anon " had never before assumed so lagging a sense in his experience. A quarter of an hour passed away,—passed twice; and a whole hour at length expended the patience of the rain-soaked Pylades, ere he made up his mind to the old experiment of shooting a second arrow to determine the lodgment of the first. Luckily, the weather was inclined to favour his enterprize. The thunder had brayed its farewell peal; the last drops of the shower had pattered over the leaves; and the gray filmy clouds seemed on the point of dispersing to disclose the clearer light of the eye of day, when Claude suddenly re-appeared upon the wall.

"At last!" cried Cecil, gladly hailing his approach. "I was on the point of going to seek you. Where have you been?"

"I don't know," panted the new comer.

"What have you seen, then?"

"I can't say," persisted Claude.

"But you have obtained some clue to the will-o'-the-wisp which has led us so confoundedly out of our way?"

"Not so much as the thread of a spider's web!" continued Claude, leaping from the wall.

"You are determined not to satiate my curiosity by too full a meal," said Cecil. "But to proceed categorically, what lies beyond the wall?"

"An ancient cemetery—as you already know;—in whose soft, springy turf, as in a framework of greenest velvet, lie enchased some score or two of worn out sepulchral tablets,—forgotten remembrances of men, and things forgotten."

"And beyond the churchyard?"

"Another wall."

"Which you escaladed as actively as this?"—

"Which I passed through a simple wicket gate."

"And discovered——"

"The most beautiful object, my dear fellow,—the fairest, loveliest thing!"

"A woman?"—

"No!—"

"A horse?"—

"An ass alone would ask it! 'Twas neither woman, horse, nor mule; but simply a ruin—a cloistered Abbey, as I take it;—with fine gothic arches—and clustering columns—and lofty transepts, such as even a Norman might exclaim upon as magnificent!"

"One might have guessed as much! One might have known that none but the cunning varlets of monks would have found out this little Land of Canaan (where sinners like ourselves find nothing to put into our mouths!) with its lakes full of fish and wild-fowl, and its pastures of fat beeves and milch-kine."

"And think you 'twas the attraction of cows and oxen," resumed his companion,

" which enticed its present inhabitants to the Abbey ?"

" Its present inhabitants ?—Hey-day !—Has it any to boast beside swifts and swallows, or, perhaps a solitary owl ?—Saw you a living thing among the ruins ?"

" Not I !"—

" Prythee, tamper no more with me, my good friend. Say out your say, or evermore hold your tongue and let us be going," cried Cecil.

" I fear we must be going," replied the adventurer, looking wistfully at his tackle on the grass. " But, for my say, it is soon said, if you but hold your questioning. Know, then, that the noble pile yonder is closed in and weather proof, in that portion of the building in former times, the dormitory and refectory of the monks ;— *ergo,* it serves for the dwelling-house of living mortals. Know, again, that the inner close in which it stands is cultivated with parterres and plat-bands of richest flowers— a sheet of flowers—a world of flowers—

nothing, whichever way you turn your eyes, but flowers, flowers, flowers;—*ergo*, it serves for the dwelling-house of the fairer sex!"

"Well urged—well argued! But did you not make surmise assurance, by pushing your discovery?—Did you not make good your entrance?"

"Your humble servant!—There were two as ill-visaged old blood-hounds stalking in the court, as you would wish not to see on a summer's day! Every time I made a movement to penetrate beyond the ruinous nave whose splendid archway forms the chief ornament of the Abbey,—*g—r—r—aw!* You should have heard the ominous growl set up by the mistrustful beasts!"

"It was lack of enterprize, then, and not of curiosity, that kept you stumbling on the threshold?"

"Threshold?—I did not reach it within a furlong! For, even had I chosen to defy two famished mastiffs——"

"Mastiffs?—They were blood-hounds but now."

" Well—blood-hounds—mastiffs—curs, or Cerberus himself,—no matter! Even had I ventured into their very jaws, who knows what further champion I might have had to defy? The lady who passed us on the road, unaccompanied as she was, was evidently of gentle, I should say, of high degree; and has probably father uncle or brother within call, to say to an intruder like myself: ' 'Tis not to the visitor who scales our walls like a housebreaker, we give welcome.' On which hint, half-a-dozen stout knaves of servants might start forth to drive one back to the scurvy road one entered."

" You are grown wondrously prudent, on a sudden!" cried Cecil somewhat out of humour. " So, after all, I was kept here an hour or so in a pelting rain, while you were botanizing among flower-beds, and playing the antiquarian among ruins!—'Tis at least *your* turn to wait;—so, *presto*, off I go to reconnoitre!"—

And he was about, in his turn, to scale the wall, when Claude eagerly detained him.

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lose no more time!" And, snatching up his paraphernalia, he proceeded, accompanied by his sage councillor, in the direction pointed out by Piscator.

"I beseech you," said he, "do not mar our chance of admittance by further indiscretion. I have discovered that the ordinary entrance to the Abbey lies close under the bank of the lake, to which its southern transept lies open. I noted also, when perched on the summit of the wall, that, at no great distance, in the contrary direction, stands a cottage, where, no doubt, we may obtain information to direct our movements. Let us not enter this enchanted castle like two starving beggars. She who had taste to adorn and cultivate yonder exquisite spot,—whether maid, wife, or widow,—is not likely to be struck by the merit of cavaliers, who come like travelling tinkers, hungering after bread and cheese. For my part, I do ever remember that comfortable creature called small-beer; let us refresh and rest ourselves before we renew the adventure!"

"Faith! there is more sense in the proposal than is always to be admired in measures of either thine or mine," cried his friend. "But, as the first proof of our good judgment, let us

"You have a magnificent ruin yonder, on the margin of the lake, my good woman; what is it called?—To whom does it belong?—Is it at present inhabited?"—inquired Cecil of his ancient hostess.

"Anan?" answered the beldame, holding up her hand to the least dunny of two deaf ears.

"I asked the name of the Abbey and of its inhabitants," reiterated the traveller.

"T'ould Abbey, grandmither," explained the child. "T'a gentry wants to knaw haw a' be colled."

"Haw t'ould Abbey be colled?—Whoy, a' be colled t'ould Abbey, to be shoar!" —bawled the dame, chuckling at her superior wisdom.

"To whom does it belong, then?" inquired Cecil, giving up his first point of interrogation.

"Ee cawn't jistly seay to whom a' did belong *than*;—a' belongs *naw* to them as owns hur."

"And who are 'them as owns hur,' my good woman?"

"Them as boides in hur."

CHAPTER III.

I pr'ythee, shepherd, if that love or gold
May in this desert place buy entertainment,
Bring us where we may rest ourselves and feed.

Shakspeare.

BREAD and cheese, and "the comfortable creature called small-beer," are far easier of attainment in a Cumbrian cottage, than an answer intelligible to ears polite. It was the hour for the able-bodied and able-minded to be abroad at labour in the fields; and the old woman and young child, from whom the two sportsmen managed to procure a small portion of the coarsest food, seemed to possess a still more moderate allotment of the King's English, to bestow upon travellers.

"Madam Maud be summut strick in years, but Madam Amy be neither here nor there."

"What do you mean by neither here nor there?"

"Madam Amy be owlder than suster Sarah, and younger, may be, than ta parson's woife."

"These ladies live quite alone?" inquired Cecil.

"Noa they doan't."

"Who resides with them?"

"There be Alison, ta waiting-woman, and owld Johnny Mayne t' shepherd, Alison's father."

"No one else?"

"Noa!—ees, a' be thof——"

"Who else?"

"Nestor and Hector—t'owld hounds, and little Galpin."

"Can any one be permitted, do you think, to view the grounds of the Abbey?"

"Nabudy, Sur, nabudy! Madam Maud kicked up a pratty bit o' dust ance on a toime, 'cause granny tuk a grand painting gemman

"And who are 'them as boides in hur'?"—

"Grandmither, the gentry be a makeing geame o' ye!" interrupted the boy.

"Anan?" said the hag, luckily turning her deafer ear to the insinuation.

"I will make mince-meat of *you*, urchin, if you presume to be saucy," cried the elder of the two young men. "But, since you have so ready a tongue, answer my questions yourself, and win this new crown for your trouble. Who resides yonder at the Abbey?"

"Ta ladies, sure!"—was now the ready reply.

"What ladies?"

"Ee cawn't seay, there be twa on 'em."

"And what are their names?"

"Madam Maud and Madam Amy."

"And pray how old are Madam Maud and Madam Amy?"

"Ee cawn't seay—they be women grown."

"And as old, perhaps, as your grandmother?" cried Claude, finishing his last mouthful of oat-cake, and mingling impatiently in the conversation.

burgundy and the best claret I ever drank; to say nothing of your good old uncle Sir Ulick's campaigning stories, still racier than his wine. But time or money spent, are not to be recalled by moaning after them. So let us make the most of the two hours' day-light still before us, and on towards Egremont."

"Without one attempt at a visit to the Abbey?"

"Without one attempt at a visit to the Abbey!—At the best, we lose one evening in the enterprize;—at the worst, (should the lady who is neither here nor there in age, prove the same who was here on horseback, and seems to be there, in clover) we may be tempted to waste another half-a-dozen at her feet. So again I say, away towards Egremont or Ravenglass! I budge not a foot on the road to the Abbey."

"I see how it is!" cried Cecil, bestowing as he spoke a liberal remuneration on the lad and his grand-dame, and gathering up his tackle to be gone. "You are afraid the news of your exploits of gallantry should reach my

nothing, whichever way you turn your eyes, but flowers, flowers, flowers;—*ergo*, it serves for the dwelling-house of the fairer sex!"

"Well urged—well argued! But did you not make surmise assurance, by pushing your discovery?—Did you not make good your entrance?"

"Your humble servant!—There were two as ill-visaged old blood-hounds stalking in the court, as you would wish not to see on a summer's day! Every time I made a movement to penetrate beyond the ruinous nave whose splendid archway forms the chief ornament of the Abbey,—*g—r—r—aw!* You should have heard the ominous growl set up by the mistrustful beasts!"

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"Threshold?—I did not reach it within a furlong! For, even had I chosen to defy two famished mastiffs——"

"Mastiffs?—They were blood-hounds but now."

" Well—blood-hounds—mastiffs—curs, or Cerberus himself,—no matter! Even had I ventured into their very jaws, who knows what further champion I might have had to defy? The lady who passed us on the road, unaccompanied as she was, was evidently of gentle, I should say, of high degree; and has probably father uncle or brother within call, to say to an intruder like myself: ' 'Tis not to the visitor who scales our walls like a house-breaker, we give welcome.' On which hint, half-a-dozen stout knaves of servants might start forth to drive one back to the scurvy road one entered."

" You are grown wondrously prudent, on a sudden!" cried Cecil somewhat out of humour. " So, after all, I was kept here an hour or so in a pelting rain, while you were botanizing among flower-beds, and playing the antiquarian among ruins!—'Tis at least *your* turn to wait;—so, *presto,* off I go to reconnoitre!"—

And he was about, in his turn, to scale the wall, when Claude eagerly detained him.

nothing, whichever way you turn your eyes, but flowers, flowers, flowers;—*ergo*, it serves for the dwelling-house of the fairer sex!"

"Well urged—well argued! But did you not make surmise assurance, by pushing your discovery?—Did you not make good your entrance?"

"Your humble servant!—There were two as ill-visaged old blood-hounds stalking in the court, as you would wish not to see on a summer's day! Every time I made a movement to penetrate beyond the ruinous nave whose splendid archway forms the chief ornament of the Abbey,—*g—r—r—aw!* You should have heard the ominous growl set up by the mistrustful beasts!"

"It was lack of enterprize, then, and not of curiosity, that kept you stumbling on the threshold?"

"Threshold?—I did not reach it within a furlong! For, even had I chosen to defy two famished mastiffs——"

"Mastiffs?—They were blood-hounds but now."

lose no more time!" And, snatching up his paraphernalia, he proceeded, accompanied by his sage councillor, in the direction pointed out by Piscator.

"I beseech you," said he, "do not mar our chance of admittance by further indiscretion. I have discovered that the ordinary entrance to the Abbey lies close under the bank of the lake, to which its southern transept lies open. I noted also, when perched on the summit of the wall, that, at no great distance, in the contrary direction, stands a cottage, where, no doubt, we may obtain information to direct our movements. Let us not enter this enchanted castle like two starving beggars. She who had taste to adorn and cultivate yonder exquisite spot,—whether maid, wife, or widow,—is not likely to be struck by the merit of cavaliers, who come like travelling tinkers, hungering after bread and cheese. For my part, I do ever remember that comfortable creature called small-beer; let us refresh and rest ourselves before we renew the adventure!"

"Faith! there is more sense in the proposal than is always to be admired in measures of either thine or mine," cried his friend. "But, as the first proof of our good judgment, let us

"You have a magnificent ruin yonder, on the margin of the lake, my good woman; what is it called?—To whom does it belong?—Is it at present inhabited?"—inquired Cecil of his ancient hostess.

"Anan?" answered the beldame, holding up her hand to the least dunny of two deaf ears.

"I asked the name of the Abbey and of its inhabitants," reiterated the traveller.

"T'ould Abbey, grandmither," explained the child. "T'a gentry wants to knaw haw a' be colled."

"Haw t'ould Abbey be colled?—Whoy, a' be colled t'ould Abbey, to be shoar!" —bawled the dame, chuckling at her superior wisdom.

"To whom does it belong, then?" inquired Cecil, giving up his first point of interrogation.

"Ee cawn't jistly seay to whom a' did belong *than*;—a' belongs *naw* to them as owns hur."

"And who are 'them as owns hur,' my good woman?"

"Them as boides in hur."

CHAPTER III.

I pr'ythee, shepherd, if that love or gold
May in this desert place buy entertainment,
Bring us where we may rest ourselves and feed.

Shakspeare.

BREAD and cheese, and "the comfortable creature called small-beer," are far easier of attainment in a Cumbrian cottage, than an answer intelligible to ears polite. It was the hour for the able-bodied and able-minded to be abroad at labour in the fields; and the old woman and young child, from whom the two sportsmen managed to procure a small portion of the coarsest food, seemed to possess a still more moderate allotment of the King's English, to bestow upon travellers.

"Madam Maud be summut strick in years, but Madam Amy be neither here nor there."

"What do you mean by neither here nor there?"

"Madam Amy be owlder than suster Sarah, and younger, may be, than ta parson's woife."

"These ladies live quite alone?" inquired Cecil.

"Noa they doan't."

"Who resides with them?"

"There be Alison, ta waiting-woman, and owld Johnny Mayne t' shepherd, Alison's father."

"No one else?"

"Noa!—ees, a' be thof——"

"Who else?"

"Nestor and Hector—t'owld hounds, and little Galpin."

"Can any one be permitted, do you think, to view the grounds of the Abbey?"

"Nabudy, Sur, nabudy! Madam Maud kicked up a pratty bit o' dust ance on a toime, 'cause granny tuk a grand painting gemman

in wi' hur, to hould a bit o' a crack with Alison; an naw, ta geates be locked, and ta hounds always astir."

"We make but poor advances," observed Cecil to his companion.

"While the afternoon advances rapidly," replied the other; "and with as much rain in its skies as would float an Armada. So prythee, lose no more time in asking idle questions, which yield us still idler answers, or we shall be benighted to-night, and be-morned in the morning, leaving a sorry account to render of ourselves, at last, to Rawdon and the very Reverend the Dean, to whom your father wrote to announce our arrival full ten days ago."

"And term commencing on Thursday next!" cried Cecil, in despair. "My father would never let me hear the last of the misdemeanour, if I should be handed up a second time as I was last year. Fools that we were, my dear Claude, to loiter away those five good-for-nothing days in Dublin!"

"They were good for some very tolerable

burgundy and the best claret I ever drank; to say nothing of your good old uncle Sir Ulick's campaigning stories, still racier than his wine. But time or money spent, are not to be recalled by moaning after them. So let us make the most of the two hours' day-light still before us, and on towards Egremont."

"Without one attempt at a visit to the Abbey?"

"Without one attempt at a visit to the Abbey!—At the best, we lose one evening in the enterprize;—at the worst, (should the lady who is neither here nor there in age, prove the same who was here on horseback, and seems to be there, in clover) we may be tempted to waste another half-a-dozen at her feet. So again I say, away towards Egremont or Ravenglass! I budge not a foot on the road to the Abbey."

"I see how it is!" cried Cecil, bestowing as he spoke a liberal remuneration on the lad and his grand-dame, and gathering up his tackle to be gone. "You are afraid the news of your exploits of gallantry should reach my

sister Horatia. Or, perhaps, had the Lady Maud been of tender years——"

"A truce to conjectures," cried Claude, pushing him out of the cottage; "and let us be trudging."

And away they trudged; grumbling not a little on reaching the mainroad they had followed in the morning, at the canal-like appearance of the ditches, and plashy, miry, miserable condition of the causeways. All that remained for them, was to push forward to the nearest farm to hire horses and a guide. Claude, who seriously desired to divert the thoughts of his companion from the Abbey and its inhabitants, wearied himself in unloosing and hunting down the bagged-fox topics of common-place conversation; while Cecil remained listless and abstracted, answering at random, and questioning not at all; till, on a sudden, just as the closing twilight admitted of their discerning in the distance a farm-house—the long desired object of their pilgrimage—he suddenly ejaculated: "By Heavens, it was the loveliest creature that ever my

waking eyes beheld!—Such have I dreamed of—such yearned after,—but till this morning never looked upon. And, shall I abandon all chance of seeing her again, when to-morrow I quit the North, and without intent of returning hither for the remainder of my days?"—

"Far better," cried Claude, "than embark in a wild-goose chase, beginning with a wet jacket, and ending with—the Heavens, or their antipodes, know what!"

"Well, well—this vein of philosophy sits well on *you*," cried Cecil. "In me, 'twere 'foul disproportion — thoughts unnatural!' Proceed, therefore, to Ravenglass, if you can procure a nag; and I, whether on horse or foot, will straightway retrace my way to the Abbey."

For some time, Claude attempted, with the utmost force of persuasion and argument, to deter his friend from his project; but, finding his representations unavailing, and trusting that a short trial would disgust the enthusiast with a night-ride in miry weather and an un-

familiar country, and induce him to turn his horse's head and rejoin him, he at length acquiesced. Escorted by a farming-lad by way of guide, he accordingly made onwards in the direction of the coast; while Cecil, mounted on the farmer's favourite hackney, and accompanied, for a sufficient fee, by the farmer's son, who seemed unwilling to trust so trusty a steed out of sight, departed on his Quixotic adventures.

Once upon the road, the young man did not fail to extract further intelligence from his rustic esquire. Though the Abbey lay at a distance beyond his immediate parish and ken, Hobnail knew enough to swear that it was a ruinous hole; and, if a church in the olden time, by no means a place of fitting habitation for modern christians. Nothing could be clearer to his perceptions than that those who chose to reside there, did it for lack of a better domicile. He had never seen the two mysterious daughters of Eve;—but described them from report as "two queerish, outlandish kind

of women, who did a power o' good i' the coontry-soide, with physic-stuff and Gospel-lessons."

"Physic-stuff and Gospel-lessons!"—Cecil, who had his Farquhar and 'Beaux Stratagem' by heart, pshawed at the idea of his Queen of Faery transmuted into a broad-skirted Lady Bountiful, brewing and dispensing cordial waters to the old women of the parish; and, by way of silencing his companion, lightened the remainder of the road by carolling the following idle ditty of the olden time:

Ballad.

Where stands a castle, proudest
Of all that guard the Rhone
Above, the winds blow loudest,
Below, the waves flow on!

There, leant the rampart over
A lady fair and lone,
Who mourned her captive lover;—
But the murm'ring waves flowed on!

Quoth she " If tears endear me
To that loved absent one,
Ye woods, ye waters—hear me!—"
But the murm'ring waves flowed on!

" He sought me of my mother
But gold or lands had none;
And they gave me to another,—"
But the murm'ring waves flowed on!

" 'Twas then that, broken-hearted,
To battles lost or won,
He for the East departed—"
But the murm'ring waves flowed on!

" The Paynim war-trump sounded,
The Crescent fiercely shone;
And he was captured—wounded—"
But the murm'ring waves flowed on!

" And now where Christians languish,
On Syria's dungeon-stone
He lies, nor dreams my anguish."—
But the murm'ring waves flowed on!

" Ah! lady hush!—Beside thee
Thy lord o'erhears thy moan,
Away!—ere ill betide thee!—"
But the murm'ring waves flowed on!

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"Whew!—Nestor—Hector—whew, boy!—down, down!" interrupted the cow-boy, perceiving that the two hounds were taking somewhat mistrustful cognizance of the stranger who addressed the moon so familiarly, but had nothing to say to themselves.

"I'se be thinking, Master," he continued, coming closer to Cecil, as if to point him out to the dogs as an acquaintance of his own; "I'se be thinking that if we were to gang our ways at once t' kitchen door——"

"The ways of the kitchen door are not *my* ways," replied his temporary master. "Tell me, prythee, where lies the ladies' entrance?"

And Master Ralph having pointed to a low postern leading from the cloisters, Cecil was about to raise the huge iron ring appended to the heavy-knobbed oaken door, when before he could make his summons audible, he found himself tapped lightly on the shoulder, and, on turning hastily round, was accosted by a beautiful boy, scarcely past the age of childhood, attired in a short white tunic, who with very

little ceremony demanded his business and vocation.

"A traveller from the South who, having lost his way crossing Sty Head from the gorge of Borrowdale," said Cecil, "would fain find a lodging for the night."

"Not here, I trust," said the child, saucily, and, raising his hand as if to shade his bright blue eyes from the intense moonlight, while he examined the person and habiliments of the intruder. "Our ladies of Holycross keep no hostel for the accommodation of man and beast. Nevertheless, if an hour's shelter and a meal's refreshment would serve your purpose——"

"Excellently—since more extensive hospitality is denied," said Cecil, chiefly anxious to gain admittance into the house. "Foot-sore and weary as I am, a stool to rest on and a cup of water to refresh me, were a charity for which I should be thankful."

And his heart leapt within him, when the boy, applying to the oaken door the key he carried in his hand, promised to conduct him

to the presence of Dame Alison, who would perhaps add something more substantial to the fare he so modestly demanded.

"If you were to announce to Mistress Maud," observed Cecil, as he entered a little dark vestibule and found the page on the point of pushing open one of two doors, which stood alike ajar into chambers in both of which lights were burning, "if you were to announce at once that a stranger—"

"Who have you there with you, Galpin?" croaked a hoarse voice from one the chambers.

"Who have you there with you, Galpin?" whined a feeble voice from the other.

And ere the boy could frame a reply, "Who have you there, with you Galpin?" was reiterated by a third voice,—Cecil could not say from whence,—so enchanted was his ear by the bird-like sweetness of its intonation.

"A stranger, if it please your Ladyship," replied the boy, without entering either apartment; and the word "stranger" was so immediately caught up in chorus by the three voices, that it became impossible for Cecil

to discover whether it were to the gruff, the feeble, or the melodious, that Galpin addressed his reply. But there was no time for the indulgence of his curiosity. In a moment, the two doors were flung open; at the one, appeared a withered visage surrounded by a plaited coif; while, at the other, poor Cecil had the happiness to hail the identical star-bright beauty of which he was in chase! Her riding skirt and cap thrown aside, Mistress Amy stood before him, with the light held at the opposite door by old Alison reflected upon her lovely, face; and as she retreated into the chamber, incoherently announcing: "A gentleman, dear aunt—a strange gentleman," Cecil unhesitatingly followed;—bowing low at every step, and at every bow explaining, in hurried terms, the disastrous plight he had chosen to invent for himself in pretext for intrusion.

A rapid glance round the room, once an abbatial sanctuary and now the bower-chamber of ladies fair, enabled him to descry that its antique furniture was of a mean quality, as

well as worn and faded. Yet the atmosphere was strongly impregnated with the sickly fragrance of frangipane; while on the rude oak table drawn towards a hearth whereon, in spite of the fineness of the night, a heap of pine-logs was blazing, lay a snuff-box and a *bonbonnière*,—an open letter and a volume bound in velvet and ornamented with clasps of richly chased gold. Close beside it, in a high-backed chair covered with rugged tapestry, sat a tall, rigid looking female; who, after listening attentively to Cecil's harangue and carefully noting the high-bred courtesy of his address, bade him, with considerable gravity, be welcome to her roof,—be seated,—be of good cheer;—and, by the time he had thrice repeated his history, so as to have become tolerably fluent in its details, and thrice been assured by the lady stricken in years, that she rejoiced in the opportunity of being serviceable to him, all parties appeared tolerably at ease.

Cecil meanwhile, found the younger of the ladies Bountiful, far fairer in her stomacher

and knots, than even her masculine attire of the morning: nor did the mysterious ladies of the Abbey who lived

> Remote from cities, like the swain
> Unvexed by all the cares of gain

of Gay's then recent fable, scorn to gather from the lips of so polite a traveller tidings of the civilized world;—of the playhouses and the prayhouses;—popular poets and popular preachers;—of court fashions and city politics;—the fiddle-faddle of Lady Mary Wortley, and Sir Charles Hanbury Williams;—the vogue of Quinault's operas and Congreve's comedies. Yet ever and anon, the successful adventurer could not help thinking he discerned glances of significant and supercilious meaning pass betwixt Madam Maud and Madam Amy;—more especially when he enlarged upon the gaieties of the court, and described as an eye witness, the gala recently given at the King's Mews, in honour of the wedding of the Prince of Wales with Augusta of Saxe Gotha.

"I see they take me for an impudent ad-

venturer!" thought the young man, — so construing the contemptuous expression of countenance with which his elder hostess listened to his mention of St. James's and its illustrious hosts. "But no matter! even their mistrust shall not seduce me into the needless braggartry of announcing myself. Let them suppose me what they list; since they are so chary of their confidence, as to withhold from me their name and condition. Under all circumstances, however, they cannot choose but offer me a bed; and by'r Lady, to-morrow morning shall work wonders for me!"

He continued, therefore, to exercise his liveliest conversational powers for the entertainment of his companions. Inexplicable as was their position, two things regarding them was sufficiently plain;—that the elder, who from her black robe and hood of a peculiar shaping, her massive gold chain and cross, might be inferred a member of some religious community, had, at some period or other of her existence, been jumbled into contact with the

very greatest of the great world; but that the other, gay and naïve as was compatible with the strictest feminine delicacy, was a child of the wilderness, uncontaminated by the corruptions of social life. Thus far indeed, was avouched by the demeanour of both;—nor had Cecil spent an hour in their society,—sipping small hyson and seasoning it with small talk in a manner that might have done credit to the afternoon circle of some antiquated maid of honour at Hampton Court, —without discerning certain traits of striking resemblance between the two, such as might warrant the supposition of closest affinity between them. Were they in reality aunt and niece; or *what* were they,—*who* were they,— and *why* residing in that ex-mundane spot? Had the spinster-mother retreated thither from the indignation of some family of high condition, after having introduced into it under the screen of her hoop, some nameless and inadmissible scion?—Provoking and perplexing guesses! Why could he not gratify his curiosity, by a plain question following a

plain avowal?—Why not say at once, "I have deceived you, gentlest ladies, in announcing myself an obscure traveller, you behold in me——" But no! it was at present neither his business nor his pleasure to acquaint them *whom* they really beheld under the humble designation by which he had chosen to be known.

It happened, however, that Mistress Maud, having been roused by Cecil's arrival out of her habitual evening doze, was growing irresistibly drowsy. Her eyes drew straws,—her head nodded;—nor would the aid of either snuff-box or *bonbonnière* avail to keep her eye-lids unclosed, while her visitor entered learnedly into lengthy details of Saxon and Roman architecture, — of Norman and British cathedrals,—the Domkirch at Cologne and the Domo at Milan—crypts, transepts, choirs, chancels, naves and sacristies! At length, and undisguisedly, the lady slept; yea, slept and snored; and, either to avert their guest's attention from so vile a frailty, or from some other cause best known to herself,

Amy was soon afterwards moved to observe in an undertone to her visitor:

"Confess that you are strangely puzzled to make us out?—you, who would fain pass yourself upon us for so fine a gentleman, does it not amaze you, that one who has evidently swam in a gondola and seen the Louvre, like my lady kinswoman yonder, (who *soit dit en passant*, would expire in her sleep did she conjecture what eloquent music her nose is discoursing) should content herself to do penance here from summer to summer—from christmas to christmas,—with no better company than my wilful, sinful self, — two clod-hopping servitors like Alison and her father, —little Galpin the page, and some half dozen horned owls, who harbour during the winter in the old belfry?—Does it not amaze you?" —said Amy with an arch smile, fixing her liquid blue eyes inquiringly upon his face.

"You have named a palliative such as must render seclusion not only endurable—"

"But a heaven on earth!—My own sweet

society of course.—Spare your labour, gentle Sir! Bumpkins as we are, so much at least are we skilled in the flummeries of life as to know that gallant anglers like yourself bait your hooks with gaudy feathers and ends of silk,—good enough to entrap the silly fry for which you condescend to throw the line."

"On my life—my soul!" cried Cecil—

"On your life, your soul—as Beau Fribble says in the play,—but as a man of honour should be above saying in order to give weight to that which is lighter than the summer gossamer!"—cried Amy.

"You wrong me," hastily interrupted Cecil, with encreasing fervour. "From the moment I beheld your face this morning—"

"From the moment you beheld my face *this morning?*—How befel the chance, I pray you, fair Sir, of any such beholding?—*You* who, on our own showing crossed the mountains from Borrowdale late in the afternoon; while *I* returned at mid-day from my morning's

ride to Calder Abbey. Soho! Monsieur Traveller!—Soho! found out!—Be at least consistent in the romances of your fabrication."

"Dame Alison desires to know, Madam, does the stranger gentleman sleep to-night at the Abbey?"—inquired the little page of Mistress Amy; having entered the room on tiptoe to remove the enamelled tray and tea-cups,—the pride and glory of his elder lady.

"I cannot at present disturb my aunt to make the inquiry," replied the beauty, half pouting at the ill-timed question which she was not privileged to answer in the affirmative she saw would have been so welcome to her guest; and which, perhaps, if the truth were told, might not have been altogether disagreeable to herself. "But, while we wait her waking, fetch hither a flambeau, Galpin; and bid old Mayne attend at the western portal. I have promised you shall show this gentleman the crypt and cloisters of the Abbey."

A significant glance directed towards Cecil, warned him that the duty required of him

was ready compliance: nor in his heart could he help thanking the positive damsel for having devised a pretext for getting him out of the way while she awakened Mistress Amy, and preferred her entreaties that a night's lodging might be vouchsafed to so agreeable a guest. For that entreat she would, Cecil never doubted: and he accordingly followed the saucy child out of the chamber, convinced that ere he entered it again, all would be settled to his satisfaction with the elder lady.

Old Mayne had been summoned, and old Mayne obeyed the summons, and old Mayne grumbled while he obeyed: muttering that, "'Twas no such pleasant thing, forsooth, for a man of threescore years to quit a hearth-side where the embers were glowing, on a frosty October night, to pace thechill-striking gravestones of an abbey aisle, or bear a blazing flambeau aloft amid the clinging damps of a vaulted crypt;" and, while he sullenly plodded along the echoing cloisters, followed by the listless guest, little Galpin

flitted hither and thither before them among the columns: now in moonlight, now in shade, —laughing, halloing, and anon creeping back to Cecil's side, and affecting to address him in faint and awe-stricken whispers.

"Beside yonder shrine," faltered the lad, "observe the marble effigies of the warrior on his bier; extended at full length, palm against palm, and greave against greave; his lance and red-cross shield beside him. 'Tis the tomb, sir, of no less a man than Dacre of Gilsland, whose bones, for crimes untold of, are said to have been refused christian burial by the monks of St. Mary's in Furness, and the prior of Bolton: and lo! to this day, every month, when the new moon glimmers yonder through the western arch, uprises the stone figure from its grim resting-place, and, stalking with measured tramp along the very aisle we are treading, kneels down yonder in the choir, before a niche where once stood a miraculous image of Our Lady, to do penance with Ave Marias and Paternosters until daylight. At early cockcrow, the garden

lads have oftentimes seen it retreating back to the tomb, when the rattling of the marble armour, as it lies down again, is ghastly to hear."

"His soldiership seems tranquil enough to-night," said Cecil, casting a passing glance upon the finely preserved effigy of a recumbent warrior, which graced the mausoleum of the Dacres.

"And see yon iron door, gentle Sir! Wot you whither it leads?" inquired the urchin resuming his ominous whisper.

"To the belfry, perhaps,—perhaps, to the cool and well-vaulted binns of the monks?"

"To the judgment chamber, Sir, where refractory sinners were tried and condemned of old; where the decaying masonry of the walls discovers many a frightful niche of immurement; and lo! at the feet of every skeleton stands an earthen cruise, placed there to furnish the last measure of their earthly nourishment!—Day and night, Sir, winter and summer, moans may be heard in that grated chamber, such as curdle the human blood

to hear! Lower your torch, Daddy Mayne!" he continued, addressing the greyheaded shepherd. "Lower your torch, for the gentleman to see the grating that gives vent to the judgment chamber."

"Wha gae thee freedom, younker, to prate o'thae things?" growled the old man. "Lead on t'quoire, and haud 'ee peace, or t'll be the warse for'ee."

And, following their guidance, the stranger traversed the nave, now roofless and open to the winds of Heaven; graced, in lieu of banners captured from the infidels, with streaming brambles, and floating pennons of ivy that shed their desolate blossoms from many a rift among the crumbling arches; while the torches carried by the page and the old shepherd casting a warm reflection on the walls within reach of their radiance, seemed to impart a glow of life to the fiendish visages grinning from many a sculptured 'coigne of vantage.' But beyond—beyond at a far distance — the cold, calm, holy moon poured her chastened light upon the pavement of the

chancel; revealing here a ruined shrine, and there an empty niche, and, below all, the grave-stones with their half obliterated tributes to the memory of the long long dead !—

" Behold, Sir," whispered the boy, approaching nearer to Cecil and plucking him by the sleeve to excite attention lest he should be overheard by his morose companion. " Around us is the haunt of fiends, and evil spirits: and, when the brambles rustle as the bats flit by, one might swear one heard them croaking their fearful vespers overhead. Yonder is the spot where the fairy train gain grace to gambol and dance on holy ground on St. John's eve, Sir, or Candlemas, or the vigil of St. Antony; on which nights, not a man in all the dales of Cumberland would enter the Abbey and guide you hither as I am doing now. 'Tis said, indeed, that ——"

At that moment, the boy interrupting himself in his narrative, shrieked aloud for fear. A stern gripe fixed its hold upon his shoulder; nor was it till he perceived that

Cecil had advanced towards him and was pointing in the direction of the moonlit aisle, that he gained courage to demand of the guest the motive of his interruption.

"Be silent!" said Cecil. "Keep your death's head legends for those that ask them: and tell me whether yonder figure be the effigy of an impaled nun, or a creature of daily life?"

And again he pointed towards an opening in the distant aisle; where a moment before a figure clad in loose drapery, and veiled in white, had been distinctly visible.

"I see nothing," said the boy.

"Nor I," quoth Daddy Mayne, straining his bleared eyes in the same direction.

"Nor I!" cried Cecil, striving to laugh when he found that the vision had disappeared, or that his eyes had deceived him. "And yet I could have sworn I saw the figure of a woman standing motionless yonder in the moonlight."

"One of t'marble pillars!" growled old Mayne.

"I say the figure of a woman!" reiterated Cecil.

"Like enough!" murmured the page, his voice sinking to a whisper. "Such apparitions were nightly seen wandering about the ruins here, at Furness, and Calder Abbey, just before the rising of the north in the fifteen. I have heard Madam Maud declare ——"

He stopped suddenly. A strain of music rising in the air, seemed to hover like the flight of a bird among the ruined arches of the ancient pile. Slight and melodious as it was, Cecil could distinguish the following wild verses as the burden of the song:

Away! 'tis midnight's witching hour!
The owl that haunteth
Yon churchyard yew and mould'ring tower
Her vespers chaunteth;—
List not! the hell-hag with her imps
Thine ear entranceth;
Gaze not! the meteor's livid glimpse
Around thee glanceth!

The toad that squats on yonder grave
With bright eye gleaming,—
The leathern bat that flits the nave,
The nightbird screaming,—
The swollen reptiles, poison-fed
In silence creeping,
Keep watch around !—the quick and dead
Alone are sleeping.

Arise, ye flesh-denuded forms
Bare-skull'd and grinning,—
Arouse, ye slumberers with the worms,
The game is winning !
Toll out, thou bony skeleton,
Our ghastly measure ;
With shrieking mandrakes strewn, lead on
The path of pleasure !

Hurrah ! the sable banner's fold
Is darkly playing
O'er lone Dunbar's dark ramparts old
And line decaying :—
Hurrah ! the heir's stern requiem swell,—
His moments number ;—
Hurrah ! prepare yon wormy cell
To grace his slumber !

Startled by the burden of a song, which evidently addressed itself to the friend with

whom he had that morning parted, Cecil's heart thrilled within him. A young Oxonian of the eighteenth century was not likely to be over-susceptible to the influence of the supernatural. Yet the singular adventure in which he had embarked, the hour, the scene, the growing ascendancy of the mysterious beauty, the genius of that sequestered place, conspired to augment the amazement with which he heard his friend,—his bosom-friend,—his companion of many months past—his brother-in-law of some future moment—thus apostrophized at midnight in the ruined Abbey of Holy Cross!—His heart swelled with emotion, his breath came short, and, as the verse proceeded, he gradually advanced towards that part of the building from which the sound appeared to emanate: till, at the conclusion, he found himself standing where the pale moonshine gleamed fairest and brightest into the roofless transept.

As the song ceased, he turned hastily to question his companions. But where were they?—gone—vanished—no page, no torch-

light visible!—He called aloud on Galpin—not a word!—on the shepherd—no answer! He strove to retrace his steps, he traversed the church, he passed the warrior effigy of Gilsland, the fearful grating of the chamber of judgment;—not a living being to be heard or seen!—To venture into the darker portions of the church, encumbered as it was with fallen cornices and jutting abutments, was not a tempting task; yet even thither he wandered, and in vain.

Again he called aloud on Galpin, on the shepherd;—nay, on Madam Amy and Dame Alison to come and release him. And this time the mocking laughter of fiends derided his appeal; and a chuckling croak from the north was answered by a shrill burst of merriment from the south.—He stamped—he swore—and again the mirth of his invisible tormentors was renewed.—He felt as if the grotesque masks were grinning and making mouths, as if a thousand unearthly things were in league against him. He was overmastered,

derided. Neither strength nor courage could avail against such enemies.

At length, the syren voice by which he had been fascinated, once more addressed him :

" Rejoin your friend, Sir Knight !" said its clear, shrill accents. " And when master Claude shall demand from master Cecil an account of his exploits at the old Abbey, fail not to tell him that the Queen of Faery *Vale* and her elfings remained masters of the field !"—

CHAPTER V.

This is no mortal business, nor no sound
That the earth owes.

Shakspeare.

"You draw too largely on my credulity!" cried Sir Claude Dunbar to Lord Cecil Reresby, one gloomy night in November, as they sat cheating the weariness of the time over a bottle of claret in Dunbar's snug apartment overlooking the venerable quadrangle of Christ Church; some weeks after their return from passing the summer vacation in Ireland, at the seat of Lord Cecil's father, the Marquis of Grandison.

"Or on mine," exclaimed a young clergyman named Rawdon, at once the college tutor and friend of the two young men; "after all I believe you are both in league to play upon my good faith with the marvels of a Winter's Tale!"

"Honour bright, not I!" cried Dunbar. "I blush to return from the land of lakes mountains and trout streams, without a single exploit to boast worthy the attention of so zealous a disciple of Walton, and so devout a votary of the muse. But I plead my insignificance! Driven by stress of weather into Whitehaven instead of Holyhead, Reresby and myself, having timed the date of our return to our last moment of leisure, agreed to make the best of our way to Oxford; when, fool as I was, finding we had still a day on hand, I suffered myself to be persuaded to take a peep at the far-famed lakes of Cumberland, and enjoy if possible an afternoon's fishing, such as the season afforded."

"Which, you knew, afforded nothing!"

added Rawdon. "So, after sleeping at Calder Abbey, you set forth on foot to Wastdale, got drenched to the bones, and were rewarded for cold, hunger, and a hail shower, by the momentary sight of some farmer's goodly housewife, trotting home on Dobbin from the neighbouring market!—All this I have already heard, am willing to hear again, and to credit, the last time as the first."

"Extending your belief," added Dunbar, stretching out his limbs before the fire, "so far as my safe return to Whitehaven early in the night, and Reresby's re-appearance early in the morning."

"Common-place and credible enough!—"

"While I," continued Dunbar, "am resolved to limit my faith to the tale our marvel-loving friend here was pleased to relate on our journey back to Oxford, videlicet: that disgusted by the state of the roads he abandoned his project, and attempted to join me at Ravenglass; found I had already quitted the inn; and, after refreshing himself, while his horse was baiting, with a jug of nappy north

country ale, became too sleepy to proceed and so rejoined me at day-break."

"Indebted no doubt to the aforesaid nectareous potation for his dreams of fays and goblins, Ariels, and Calibans," cried Rawdon. "Would I could sleep so much to the purpose! Belinda's lock and its sylphs should no longer monopolize the admiration of Grub Street; but a duodecimo of Rosycrucian philosophy go forth to prove that others have out-imagined the imagination of the bard of T wit'nam."

"Sleepy yourself, to give your readers sleep," cried Dunbar.

"'Tis all very well," observed Lord Cecil, who since his return to Oxford had fallen into a strangely absent frame of mind. "You laugh at me for a crack-brained visionary, and I expected no other at your hands. For this, I forbore at first to inflict my revelations on Dunbar; who I foresaw would treat me as a dupe, or as seeking to make him mine. On rejoining him, therefore, I framed an excuse to serve all immediate purposes of explanation.

But the impression has since gained such ground upon me, that I am no longer able to drive it from my thoughts. If I sleep, it is to dream of the Abbey; nor can even our worthy professor's prosiest prose efface from my waking mind the poetical associations connected with that bewildering spot. One moment I convince myself that I was befooled by a set of cunning jades, who amused a dull evening by playing off their pranks at my expense; the next, I become more firmly persuaded than ever, that the beings I saw were creatures of the elements—motes in the moonbeam,—revealed by some magnetic influence to my sight."

"A clear case of nympholepsy!" cried Rawdon. "If you continue in this disordered state of mind, my dear Lord Cecil, I shall make it a matter of conscience to bleed and blister you, according to the most approved formula of Warwick Lane."

"I begin to think that I *am* mad, or likely to become so!" ejaculated Reresby, with a despondency of air and tone that did not escape the attention of his companions.

" But prythee tell me, my dear Cecil," cried Dunbar, growing more serious, " what chanced after, on finding yourself alone in the Abbey, and a thousand scramblings and turnings, you made your way forth again?—How happened it that you returned not to the door through which you at first entered the inhabited portion of the building?"—

" For full an hour I tried to retrace my steps thither in vain. The night became over-clouded; not a soul seemed stirring in the premises; the darkness of the sky threatened a recurrence of the showers of the afternoon. Nestor and Hector were not forgotten in my cogitations; and when, on reaching the wicket of the old dilapidated gateway where I hoped the farm lad Ralph would have been in waiting, I found only my former guide and the horses, I was glad to mount and be off. I insisted, indeed, on visiting the cottage where he had agreed to await me; but all was closed for the night, and no effort could obtain an answer; while my guide was so overpowered by drink as to be wholly unintelligible. As to

talking to the brute of the Abbey, or the ladies of Wastdale, I might as well have addressed myself to his horse. Before morning, torrents of rain increased the misery of my plight. I knew that Dunbar was impatiently waiting for me; that our departure for Oxford was indispensable; and reluctantly gave up the point of revisiting the place by daylight and deciding by whom or what I had been imposed on."

"I wish you had!"—exclaimed Dunbar.

"I felt so discouraged, so mortified, so indignant!—It was my purpose to explain all to you on my arrival, and claim your councils; but you accosted me in so bantering a vein respecting my adventures of the night, and broad daylight was so unpropitious to the tale I was desirous to unfold, that I judged it best to remain silent."

"What opinion should you have given at the moment?" said Dunbar, addressing himself to Mr. Rawdon.

"The same I have now expressed."

"That I was maudlin!—Thank you."

"Thank me rather that I do not pronounce you crazy in right earnest."

"But what say you to Claude, then? He was with me when I first set eyes on the accursed creature who thus bewildered my senses. He admired her as I did—followed her as I did,—ay, pledged as he is in heart and hand to my sister Horatia,—followed her at the risk of breaking his neck over a churchyard wall!"

"'Tis true," said Dunbar, speaking apart to Rawdon. "She was the most lovely being I ever beheld—the most singular—the most picturesque! All he has related of our collation at the cottage and the accounts given us there of the Abbey and its inhabitants, are strictly correct."

"And on that and your participation in the intelligence has he grounded his romance," cried Rawdon, relapsing into incredulity. "And now he would actually engage our sympathy in his ideal sufferings! One

thing, however, I pledge myself to undertake in his behalf. You two are to pass the Christmas holidays at Grandison Park; and neither Lady Horatia nor the Marquis, I conclude, will spare you to go Quixotizing about the country, instead of fulfilling your engagement. I, meanwhile, am to celebrate the new year at Edinburgh; and will gladly diverge from my road to resume my route northward at Carlisle. What say you, my dear lord?—Shall I proceed to exorcise this haunted Abbey; or should I find access to its mysterious heroines—"

"Spare your trouble and your jests, Rawdon," said Reresby. "The instant term is over, I make my way to the north."

"Good!—we will go together!"—said Rawdon, extending a hand towards Cecil, which was eagerly clasped by his pupil. "It has never yet been my luck to light upon fay or spectre. Introduce me but to so much as the smallest goblin of the Abbey establishment, and I am your proselyte for ever!—Meanwhile, banish, if possible from your mind the fancy that dis-

turbs it; or, instead of a bachelor's degree by midsummer next, you will find yourself returned in disgrace upon my hands."

"You are like to lead a pleasant life of it between us, my dear Rawdon!" observed Sir Claude. "With one pupil full fathom five in love, and spending his days sonneteering to his mistress's eyebrow; and the other bewildered by a host of—"

"No more of it!" interrupted Reresby, somewhat angrily. "I find no fault with you for your romantic ravings concerning my sister Racy; and, if Lady Dunbar should consent, have promised to intercede with my father for your early marriage. In your turn, be forbearing with my infirmities. I shall mention the subject no more. Maintain a similar silence towards myself."

But although the compact thus proposed was strictly observed on the part of Mr. Rawdon and Sir Claude Dunbar, they observed with pain that Lord Cecil's mind was engrossed by the forbidden topic. His studies were neglected; he mingled no more in the

pastimes of his companions. Hitherto an eager sportsman, he loitered away his leisure in his own apartments, till his friends entertained serious apprehensions for his health or reason. As the period approached for emancipation from college rules and his journey to the north, his eye brightened, and his spirits in some degree resumed their elasticity. Dunbar would fain have accompanied his friend on his excursion, that his presence might be of service in detecting any imposture likely to be renewed upon his susceptible imagination. But Lord Cecil, tenderly attached to his sister Horatia, refused to be instrumental in delaying her lover's promised visit to Grandison Hall; and eventually, Sir Claude took his departure for Holyhead within a few weeks of Reresby's starting in company with his kind and sagacious tutor on his singular expedition. A cheerless journey was in store for all parties; for, in those old fashioned times, winter made his annual appearance arrayed in a mantle of snow and gallygaskins fringed with icicles; nor was it always that the northern mails could

force their way across the wintry waste of Staen Moor—still less penetrate the mosses and mires of western Cumberland.

Nevertheless, Lord Cecil's spirits rose from mile to mile, from post to post; and, by the time they caught sight of the lofty crests of Sca Fell and the great Gavel, overlooking the dales to which he was bound, the elation of the young nympholept knew no reasonable bounds.

CHAPTER VI.

By this we see the Fairies
Were of the old profession;
Their songs were Ave-Maries,
Their dances were procession.

Bishop Corbet.

A NEW-MADE grave is a cheerless thing to look on;—a spot of earth watered by human tears in lieu of the dews of Heaven;—a portion of the dust to which dust hath returned;—a pledge of fulfilment of the first sentence of mortal punishment;—the end-all of some tale of human happiness and hope!

But never does it look more chill, more cheerless, than when the unshapely mound,

companion. " I acceded to your proposal that we should not hazard spreading the news of our arrival by stopping at the cottage where I was formerly entertained. Pr'ythee, let us make at once for the Abbey, instead of loitering in a church-yard."

And, pricking forward over the hard-beaten snow, Rawdon was fain to follow the excited young man, till they reached a portal of venerable masonry closing a dilapidated wall, within a few furlongs of the black-looking, but never-freezing, lake of Wastwater.

" 'Tis the entrance to the Abbey," observed Reresby, in a concentrated voice. But the intelligence was superfluous; for the trees, so thickly foliaged at his first visit as to shut out every glimpse of the ruin, were now leafless; and the high towering arch of the western front stood proudly visible from the road.

" Proceed to the cottage with our horses," said Rawdon, addressing the guide; " and, in the course of a couple of hours, we will rejoin you;" — an injunction obeyed not without grumbling by the man, who had no mind to

visit a spot depopulated by a raging epidemic.

"But how is this?"—continued Rawdon, flinging ajar the shattered wooden gate that closed the solid mason-work; and entering unmolested a desolate-looking close, the snow on whose surface was unbroken by the print of footsteps. "Neither dwarf nor giant seems on the watch, my dear fellow, to guard the entrance of your enchanted castle!"

On turning towards Lord Cecil, he desisted, however, from further pleasantries. The expression of his young friend's countenance attested that all the eagerness he had hitherto evinced to bring to the proof the reality of his adventures at Holy Cross, was merged in anxiety for the fate of one who had, inspired him with so strange an infatuation; and instead of rushing towards the long-talked-of spot and verifying his midsummer day's dream, he trembled lest the depopulation of Wastdale should have comprehended the Abbey within its bills of mortality!—Inconsistency of human nature!—Cecil, who had often been heard to

surmise that the beauteous Amy was a mystic daughter of the air, feared to find her the victim of so plebeian a distemper as the typhus fever!—

"You do not imagine that any one is resident *here*?" exclaimed Rawdon, at last, after following the guidance of his pupil from aisle to aisle, from roofless nave to ruined choir.

"This is the Abbey Church of Holy Cross: the apartments of which I spoke, lay in the Monastery," replied Reresby, somewhat puzzled to recall to mind in the snow-drifted and cheerless platform around him, the paradise he had left luxuriantly sheeted with flowers.

And, again launching forth on his voyage of discovery, he reached a low portal leading to three or four ruinous chambers, the windows of which were obscured by damp and dust, the dilapidated stone floors green and discoloured, the whole place dreary, tenantless and desolate!

Rawdon had scarcely courage to fix his eyes on his companion. Reresby's previous irrita-

bility convinced him that his chimeras were no laughing matter; yet it was impossible to regard his former declarations touching the Abbey as any thing but the result of an imagination heated by wine, or disturbed by delusions. He contented himself, therefore, with a stedfast scrutiny of the rooms, the doors of which stood open; and straightway taking Lord Cecil's arm and traversing the snow, towards the gateway, proposed that they should rejoin their guide, and return to the place from whence they came so soon as the horses were baited.

"You do well to spare me," ejaculated Reresby, in a broken voice, after pursuing their way in silence; "for, on this detestable subject, I can bear neither irony nor argument. To be so deeply the dupe of thick coming fancies implies latent insanity.—Yes, Rawdon—yes—I shall die a lunatic—a miserable, heart-broken, lunatic; and, when I am dead and gone, you and Dunbar will talk over me on a winter's night, and say: 'We ought to have guessed the

poor fellow was mad, after those strange vagaries of his about the Abbey!' "

"My dear Lord—my dear friend!" said Rawdon, in a soothing tone, distressed and alarmed at his emotion, "believe me, this—"

"Yes!" interrupted the young visionary, "yes!—that is exactly the soft cajoling voice in which they will address the patient—poor mad Reresby!—That is just the tone in which they will say: 'Your Lordship is right. There *was* an Abbey—there *were* ladies abiding there—you *did* visit them one moonlight night. Compose yourself, my Lord, we admit that you were perfectly in your senses!' But, for all that, they will secure me in a strait-waistcoat, or chain me in a cell."

"What are we to say Dunbar, then?" exclaimed Rawdon, now really alarmed for the reason of his pupil, and eager to pacify his agitation. "Dunbar admits that he saw the lady you name Amy, and even heard at the cottage that—"

"True, true!" cried Reresby, snatching at his only remaining chance of information.

"Let us, at least, re-visit the cottage, and learn all that can be learned; be it only sufficient to convince you that, whatever I may hereafter become, I am now in my right senses."

And he led the way towards a hovel surrounded by a miserable enclosure; which, during the summer season, might perhaps have classed its dilapidations under the title of "picturesque,"—but which exhibited nothing, amid frost and snow, but the degradation of extreme penury.

"Was it not here that two travellers rested in the month of September last, one of whom returned on horseback, the same night, on his way to the Abbey?"—demanded Lord Cecil, of a wretched-looking labouring man, by whom, after much knocking, the door was opened.

"Wha be ye, to be speering idle questions at sic a toime?" demanded the peasant in a broad border dialect. "Ta gudewoife just carr'd ower the threshold, and the bairns lying i' the fever!—awa' wi' ye!"

"We are travellers, as you may perceive,"

said Reresby, " and ignorant of your misfortune, or we should not have presumed to disturb you."

" Gang yer ways naw, then," growled the man, slamming the door in their faces; and Rawdon, alarmed lest his young friend should expose himself in addition to his other calamities, to the perils of infection, immediately proposed to address further inquiries to the clergyman of the parish. " It is impossible," said he, " that persons of note should have been resident in such a place, unknown to the Rector."

On reaching the little straggling hamlet, however, no mansion presented itself of sufficient respectability to pass in collegiate eyes for that of a beneficed divine; and when, having retraced their steps towards the thatched church, whence the funeral-train was departing and penetrated a dark nook pointed out to them as the vestry, they beheld a homely, middle-aged man, exchanging a rusty cassock for a shabby smock-frock, the Oxonian was almost as much shocked by the aspect and

habit of the clericus of St. Bees', as by the fantastic imaginings of his pupil.

With a view to enlist in their cause the professional sympathies of his brother of the cloth, (that cloth being in the present instance no other than threadbare hodden gray) Rawdon unluckily thought fit to announce himself as Reverend, and of Oxford.

The northern-light immediately flared up! Smarting with jealousy, and hungering after Israel and its flesh-pots, he detested the high-church priest as he would have hated a Jewish Rabbi; and, closing his mouth even as if it were the parish poor-box, persisted in declaring, in reply to Rawdon's interrogations, that "there *might* have been people living at the Abbey at the time he mentioned;—that two women had resided there for many years—two miserable, misguided papists—near akin to the wretches instrumental in raising the North in the year fifteen; but that now—the Lord be praised!—the parish was rid of them!"

"*Dead?*" inquired Cecil, with a heavy heart and faltering voice.

"No,—not dead—(that he had heard of), gone, — departed, — flitted; — no one knew whither, and no one cared;—or *he*, at least, knew not, cared not, and had never inquired."

In the same morose spirit, were answers yielded by the *ehrwürdiger Pastor von Grünau*, to Cecil's inquiries touching the name, nature, habits and associations of Mistress Maud and Mistress Amy. The respondent "knew that they were called Mistress Maud and Mistress Amy, and that they belonged to the bloody-minded Church of Rome;—the Church of the Devil and the Pretender;—which was all he knew, or wished to know, about the matter."

And anon he nodded, without touching his hat to the civil querists standing beside him at the gate of his own kirkyard; and tramped off in hobnail shoes through the snow, to his agricultural occupations; after the fashion of a neighbourhood unfertile in fat livings and those evangelical loaves and fishes, which the miracles of modern Christendom convert into turbots and French rolls.

"One important point, at least, is established by our colloquy with my urbane clerical brother," observed Rawdon, when, finding from the guide, that not a house of the hamlet but was infected by the fatal fever, he persuaded Lord Cecil to remount his horse and return with him towards Ravenglass. "It can no longer be doubted that the ladies, whose existence I have been sometimes bold enough to question, were not only flesh and blood, but sufficiently good catholics to give umbrage to the pastor of Wastdale. It had more than once occurred to me, indeed, that parties leading the secluded life you described and purposely enveloping themselves in mystery, might be involved in the dangers of the Stuart cause, and, for their own safety, were compelled to 'come like shadows—so depart.' They were perhaps under hiding—certainly (as papists) under surveillance."

"It had already occurred to you—yet you never comforted me by the suggestion!" ejaculated Reresby, "I can scarcely forgive you!"

"Let me make amends for the fault, by future assiduity," cried Rawdon, charmed to witness the return of cheerful smiles to the countenance of his friend. "As it happens, I have connexions among that unfortunate party, such as may enable me to pursue our inquiries to the point. Did you ask, or do you happen to know, to whom the ruins of Holy Cross Abbey belong?"

"To some Cumberland farmer, I fancy," replied Lord Cecil. "The guide informs me that the valley is divided into small farms, belonging to proprietors known by the name of 'dalesmen.'"

"No matter! It will be easy for me so to designate the place as to ascertain, from the agents of Charles Edward, whether it be marked in their charts with the symbol of the white rose."

"My dear, dear Rawdon!—when are you likely to obtain this intelligence?" exclaimed Reresby.

"On reaching Edinburgh;—provided you covenant on your own part to proceed instantly

to Grandison Park, and take no further steps till you hear from me."

"My heart and hand upon the bargain!" cried Lord Cecil. "You resume your journey to-night?"—

"Stop, stop!—have a little mercy!" said Rawdon, pointing laughingly to the six inches of snow already on the ground, and the over-charged clouds which threatened a doubly-deep addition. "Give me one good night's rest; after which, I promise to start as readily and expeditiously on your errand as the great North mail will carry me!"

CHAPTER VII.

Countess.—In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband!

Bertrand.—And I, in going, weep o'er my father's death anew.

Sir Claude Dunbar was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. Herself sole child and heiress of a wealthy west country laird, her marriage with Sir Arthur Dunbar had preceded the fatal epoch of the political troubles of Scotland by years so few, that the influence of a bride prevailed over his weak and timid nature sufficiently to retain him snug and sober at the Castle of Dunbar, when the party to which his family was hereditarily attached, was spreading fire and fury through the country.

The unfortunate issue of the insurrection might be supposed, in some measure, to justify her conjugal prudence.

Nevertheless, after the execution of Derwentwater, Sir Arthur held up his head no more. The circumstance that more than one member of his family had remained staunch to that of Stuart, seemed only to increase the poignancy of his affliction. Before his only child, young Claude, overstepped the age of infancy, the poor man was gathered to the forefathers he had dishonoured;—dying, as was jocosely said among his enemies, of having taken too much care of his life.

From that period, the widowed Lady Dunbar seldom or ever quitted the Castle she had deprived of its laird, and the clan of its chief. Conscious, perhaps, of her fault, she evinced no desire to repress the manly spirit of her son; and, while limiting her habits and desires by rules of strictest parsimony, afforded to the boy every advantage of education that money could command. She even engaged

for him, on his repairing to Oxford for the completion of his studies, the services of a tutor recommended by the jacobite friends of the late Baronet; and, though persisting in her residence, winter and summer, at their family Castle on the shores of the Mull of Galloway, taking no thought for the morrow what she should eat or what she should drink, or for her raiment, what she should put on, took infinite care that the product of the wheels of her whole household should be laid aside to stock the future napery of the young Baronet;—and stored her cellars and garners with an abundance that seemed to anticipate a famine in the land.

Such a mother, if she did not call forth the filial tenderness of her son, had strong claims upon his gratitude. Sir Claude could not always admire the customs of the castle, but his respect for its liege lady was undeviating; and though unlike to become, as his father, a victim to passive obedience, would have suffered much ere he ventured on any measure of

importance, in opposition to the wishes of the widow.

It was under a full admission of these feelings, that he had attached himself to the sister of his schoolfellow and fellow-collegian, the lovely Lady Horatia Reresby; yet now the period was approaching to solicit the good lady's consent and assistance ere he laid his proposals in form before the Marquis of Grandison, he trembled for the result! A presentiment forewarned him that he should meet with opposition from his mother; and lo! on his arrival in Dublin on his way to Grandison Park, while waiting the arrival of Cecil to compose and dispatch to Lady Dunbar a demand for her sanction to his matrimonial views, he received from her a letter, acquainting him that she had peremptorily disposed of his hand.

"Your uncle Giles," she wrote, "whom fortune appears to favour in proportion to his slighting her gifts, has unexpectedly returned from Surinam with heaps of wealth. It is his

desire to secure it to the family by uniting you with his only daughter; and Miss Dunbar and her father being now on a visit here, I have to request you will immediately repair to the castle to do its honours to your nearest relatives—still nearer (I hope) to be."

Here was a stroke of destiny for the unfortunate Claude!

Lady Dunbar, who till now had neither mentioned the name of mortal woman to her son nor seemed to fancy he could incline towards the matrimonial estate, admitted that she had planned his immediate union! What an absolute termination to his pretensions to the hand of the high-born, high-bred Horatia! —The young lover shuddered as he thought of it! Miss Dunbar was doubtless the offspring of a marriage between his graceless uncle, (of whose movements for many years past the family had heard no tidings) and some Surinam heiress, — the amply petticoated widow or daughter of a Dutch planter! What blood, what breeding, to recommend

her to his attachment!—His heart sickened as he pondered upon the broad flat face, sandy hair, and freckled complexion of his promised wife; and he consoled himself by a vow, registered in Heaven and his heart of hearts, that if fated to abjure all hope of becoming son-in-law to the Marquis of Grandison, nothing should compel him to bestow his hand and title upon Miss Dunbar.

This determination, couched in the most respectful terms, was forthwith unfolded in a letter to his mother. Relying upon the thrifty lady's prudence to keep the communication to herself, he declared that, even were his affections disengaged, nothing would induce him to unite himself with the child of one so irregular in his conduct and loose in his principles, as the uncle whose recently acquired and probably ill-gotten wealth, endowed him with so much consequence in the family. The widow replied to this bold challenge of her authority in a similar spirit of defiance. Sir Claude retorted,—her ladyship was quick to answer the retort. That which might have

speedily been pacified between them in a war of words, promised to become a " seven," or even a " thirty years' war" when waged per return of post.

The young Baronet became reluctantly convinced, that however resolute against bestowing the family title on her who bore the family name, it was by no means a propitious moment for expediting the progress of his suit to Lady Horatia ; and the Christmas vacation, instead of affording to the two young men the superlative happiness to which they had looked forward, threatened to end " for one in madness—both in misery."

Neither Claude nor Lord Cecil afforded much addition to the brilliant assemblage at Grandison Park. Their attention was absorbed by the arrival of letters from Scotland. To Dunbar's correspondence with his mother, and Reresby's with Rawdon, was attached their every hope of earthly happiness !

But the course of true love ran unevenly for both ; and they found themselves once more buried in the learned shades of Granta to be

emancipated only by the lapse of time indispensable to their college studies — without having advanced a step towards the consummation so devoutly the object of their wishes.

It were tedious to trace page by page, volume by volume, problem by problem, the progress of the aspirants. The musty atmosphere of the Bodleian is scarcely of a quality to sustain the buoyant wings of fancy; and Ariel herself would become materialised, if enrobed in academic cap and gown. Suffice it that Rawdon's pupils having graduated with honour, bade adieu to the venerable cloisters of Christ Church—

> The sacred fountains—the o'ershadowing groves,
> Whose walks with godlike harmony resound.
> Fountains which Homer visits ;—happy groves
> Where Milton haunts : and th' intellectual power
> On the mind's throne, suspends his graver cares
> And smiles !

CHAPTER VIII.

That she is living,
Were it but *told* you, should be hooted at
Like an old tale; but it appears she lives,
Though yet she speaks not.

Winter's Tale.

It was midsummer—bright, glowing, gorgeous, glorious midsummer—

When hearts and babbling brooks are most in tune.

Roses, in flaunting array, softening from deepest damask to the pure and tender tints of maiden's-blushhood, imparted fragrance and jouvence to the garden breezes; lilies, all ivory and gold, stood overlooking the parterres with

the air of ladies at a tournament; while blue convolvuluses trailed with an azure streak upon the ground, like—

Un pezzo del ciel caduto in terra!

The fountains threw up their silver springlets into the sunshine, as if to interlace themselves with its golden rays;—while a hundred marble goddesses retreated coyly from the glare of day into the verdant nooks of the well-trimmed lime-bowers adorning the bosquets and parterres of Grandison Park! The gardens were all sweetness and bloom,—the slopes of the park beyond all majesty and shade. The dappled deer lay grouped as in sylvan meditation beneath the venerable oak trees; while the wood-pigeons winged their way in happy pairs across the clear expanse of an unclouded sky. And lo! on the shaven lawns, around a mansion of lordly degree, ladies with sweeping trains and fans outspread, and plumes that waved and nodded as they stepped, were idling side by side with red-heeled maccaronis and

courtiers in suits of velvet or paduasoy whose embroideries glistened in the sun, taking care that their swords should oppose no awkward entanglement to the mincing steps of the little silken-haired lap-dogs, trotting after the rustling furbelows of their loving ladies.

It was midsummer, — and every countenance at Grandison Park was bright as the season and the scene. A grand festival was in preparation. The offices sent forth savory steams. Marrow-bones were crushing, cullises distilling, and the aroma of citrons and rich spices exhaled from the coming banquet. The high altar of the chapel was richly covered with tapestry; velvet benches were dispersed in formal array— the marble pavement strewn with flowers, for, behold! "the darling of each heart and eye"— the daughter of that ancient house,—the lovely Horatia Reresby was about to be united to the man of her choice, Sir Claude Dunbar, the dearest friend of her dearest brother.

There could not be a handsomer couple than Lady Horatia, with her fawn-like eyes and gestures, and the noble youth who had success-

fully stemmed the tide of family opposition, to become her husband. Theirs was a true and trustful affection, theirs a destiny of peace and prosperity—even the destiny of the favoured ones of the earth;—no cares around or before them, but enough of clouds behind to enhance the brilliancy of the prospect in the distance.

The gay groups chatting, smiling and conversing, upon that courtly lawn were seen at intervals to cast impatient glances towards the long avenue of elms traversing the park; for every minute the family of the bridegroom was expected to arrive: the dowager, who for so many years had been unable to uproot herself from Dunbar Castle, having graciously consented to grace the auspicious bridal of her own—her only son. Lady Horatia, whose heart, long motherless, yearned towards her as towards a mother, trembled nevertheless at the prospect of the approaching meeting. Not that she apprehended lack of kindness or indulgence on the part of one whom, she was prepared to love and honour and obey, as

part (and a part most venerable) of him who maintained the dearest hold upon her affections; but with Lady Dunbar was expected the wealthy uncle,—the stern uncle,—the mortified uncle,—compelled by the obduracy of Sir Claude to renounce his views for his daughter upon the family honours and their representative. She knew how vast a waste of epistolary eloquence had been lavished by her lover during the six preceding months, to mollify the heart of the dowager and obtain from old Giles Dunbar the cession of his projects. But they *had* consented. The marriage-contract was ready to be signed—the marriage-tapers to be lighted. Nothing jarred against the completion of the hopes of the young couple; nor was aught unsatisfactory connected with the mode and manner of their nuptials, unless the inevitable presence of Miss Dunbar the semi-Dutchwoman, and her pragmatical father.

Yes,—one thing more! *One* circumstance was wanting to complete the happiness of

Horatia and her bridegroom. The attired figure and dejected countenance of Lord Cecil did not fail to remind them that, although he no longer courted the ridicule of his family, or the wonderment of strangers, by alluding to the marvellous adventure in which he had borne a part, the recollection did not the less powerfully weigh upon his spirits. He had perhaps given up, as a matter of question with himself, the reality of his impressions: convinced that he had indeed been admitted to the society of two ladies of condition, consigned by some strange chance to a residence at Holy Cross Abbey, who, for either wantonness or mischief's sake, had successfully practised upon his young imagination. But, was it a subject of less concern to him, that all his investigations sufficed not to discover aught concerning the fantastic but most captivating being, whose arch countenance and radiant smiles had impressed themselves more indelibly, more perplexingly upon his heart, than the most regular array of perfect loveliness?

Why, why had he been fated to hear the

music of that changeful but melodious voice;—why permitted to gaze upon the spell-like brightness of those speaking eyes—to witness that gracious play of sportive fancy? His soul was still entranced by the charm of an interview so brief, that the cistus flower has a longer existence—the summer lightning almost as prolonged a brightness. Day after day, he wandered hither and thither through the wooded glens of Grandison Park, and hung in listless abstraction over the falling waters of each wild cascade. He was no longer himself—no longer capable of applying his powers of mind to the common purposes of life. His family began to look upon his condition rather with terror than with pity; and when about ten days previously to the marriage of Lady Horatia and Sir Claude, Mr. Rawden, who had been the able negociator for his pupil with the family at Dunbar Castle, arrived as a plenipotentiary at Grandison Park, with full powers from the Dowager to treat for the hand of the beautiful daughter of the Marquis, half the tutor's time was occupied, during the first two

days, in private confabulation with his Lordship touching the health, moral and physical, of Lord Cecil,—its symptoms, tendencies, and chances of convalescence ; the mystery of which was a problem which the learned pundit of Christ Church alone seemed capable of solving.

The result of these consultations did not transpire. Many persons at the Hall inferred, indeed, from the cheered demeanour of Lord Grandison, after the first interview, that counsels had been imparted likely to secure the restoration of his son. Yet, after the momentary elevation of spirits produced by the announcement of Horatia's happy prospects, Lord Cecil relapsed into all his former dejection; and, though Rawdon and the Marquis appeared satisfied that an amendment was in progress, his kinsfolk and acquaintance were of opinion that the happiness he was required to witness, served only to demonstrate to the unfortunate young man, that he was himself miserable beyond all hope, and sick past all surgery.

At length arrived the day of days; and the young lover, who beheld its auspicious auroral uprise beside the earth, sandalled with gold and arrayed in a mantle of purple resplendent with showering light, felt assured that the blessing of Heaven was upon its great events. From earliest dawn, the air was alive with music and mirth; every thing and every body laughed aloud with glee,— saving the gentle bride, whose pensive grace promised smiles hereafter, as a showery morning fore-shows the brightest noon.

While all the rest of the gay household paraded the great galleries or the blooming gardens, Horatia wandered apart in her snow-white bridal array, leaning upon the arm of Lord Cecil; for, at a moment of such general hilarity, she felt that her brother needed consolation. Ever and anon, Sir Claude deserted the joyous company of guests, to hold a moment's converse with his beloved; and when, at last, he ventured to reproach her, that on such a day her countenance should retain a single trace of sadness, her tearful eye glanced

from his towards the dejected figure of his friend, reminding him of the presence of a deep-seated sorrow.

Lady Horatia dreaded, however, lest her brother should suppose himself an object of commiseration; and attributing her sadness to the anxieties attendant on a first meeting with her future family, whispered to Dunbar, that till his mother and uncle had embraced her and sanctified his choice, her heart could not be at ease. And again, for the twentieth time, Dunbar flew to the window commanding the great avenue, to ascertain whether the tardy travellers were in sight; leaving Horatia and his friend alone beneath the old oak-tree.

"Sister!" faltered Cecil, as he placed himself beside her on the bench of fretted marble; "I have long looked to this day as the crowning one of my destiny; having waited but to see you happy in Dunbar's protection, I purpose to quit my home—my country—and seek in distant climes, and a new aspect of nature, relief from the heavy cares that overpower my soul. Be happy, dearest Horatia,—happy as I

once hoped to be,—happy as I shall be no more. I was ambitious, and my aspirings have passed away; I was covetous of domestic peace,—and lo! a desert lies before me! No matter;—the two beings dearest to me on earth will be indebted to each other for the happiness which is denied to me; and, satisfied that all is well with those whom my soul loveth, I shall resign myself to go down to the grave undistinguished and unloved,—without a name—without a tear—without a requiem!"

He paused; for at that moment a strain of inspiriting music burst upon their ears. The travellers were approaching,—the happy moment was come.

Again, the rustic pipes and tabors sounded stirringly from a distance. There was a crowd —a clamour;—the bridegroom's family were come, and looking eagerly around them for the object of his choice.

Cecil and Horatia beheld the Marquis approaching them along the laurel-shaded shrubbery, leading by the hand a stately but soft-browed dame, whose resemblance to their

beloved Claude proclaimed her to be his mother.

"Let us meet them by the way," whispered Reresby, offering his brotherly support to the trembling Horatia, but wondering within himself that Sir Claude did not make his appearance to conduct her to the feet of his parent. But it was in her *arms* that Lady Dunbar received her daughter-in-law; — it was to her *bosom* that again and again, she closely pressed her;—and Cecil's feelings were so penetrated by the joy of seeing his sister thus cordially welcomed, that, for a moment, he had no eyes for any other object.

But, what strange sight has brought, at length, the colour into his pale cheek, as he uplifts his eyes in search of the bridegroom? What sudden shock hath wrung such a cry of wonderment and joy out of his heart?—Some incident which seems a source of general gratulation; for his father has placed his hand encouragingly on the young man's shoulder, and Rawdon's face is bright with smiles, and Horatia and the bridegroom are turning a deaf ear

to the exhortation of Lady Dunbar, while Lord Cecil stands transfixed, and at length recovers himself sufficiently to accept the proffered hand of a fair and graceful girl, which the prompting of a jovial old gentleman extends towards him.

"Have you nothing better than an awkward obeisance to tender to my lovely cousin, Mistress Amy Dunbar?" cried Sir Claude, without pity for his friend's confusion.

"Have you no remonstrances to address to my daughter?" cried the ex-Antonio of Surinam.

"Have you no homage to render to your future wife?" added the Marquis.

And at that announcement, all present heartily sympathised in the rapture of the wonder-whelmed Lord Cecil. His quondam preceptor (by whose sagacity these marvels had been brought to bear) stood rubbing his hands for joy, and explaining to the inquiring guests that every preparation had been secretly com-

pleted for the solemnization of a double wedding.

The bells now rang out a merry peal, when the Marquis was the first to propose their adjournment to the house. And then, in the grand saloon, the two young couples were formally presented to the valetudinarian Mistress Maud, the aunt of Claude and Amy,—in her youth a Maid of Honour to the deposed queen consort of England, at the court of St. Germain; and, during her age, guardian to the only daughter of Giles, her banished brother, in the sequestered Abbey of Holycross—the last remnant of an estate squandered in the cause of the Stuarts.

"But they are wealthy, now,—enormously, prodigiously wealthy," observed Rawdon, in explaining to the inquisitive country cousins the particulars of a plot graced by so charming a *dénouement*. "Mr. Dunbar's first care, on his return to England, was to hasten down to the miserable dwelling he had been compelled to assign to his sister and his child, and remove

them from a spot rendered doubly dreary by the perils of infection. Thus deserted (for the young orphan adopted into their household shared with the faithful Alison and her father their journey to Dunbar Castle), the rooms they had occupied at the Abbey were speedily dismantled by marauders, and left to the undisputed dominion of the rats and bats: so that, on Lord Cecil's second visit, all wore the aspect of utter desolation. Miss Dunbar, conscious of the strong impression produced by her incantations, had perhaps maliciously calculated on the probability of her guest's return, and the wonder likely to be excited in his mind, by the transformation of the place."

"But how chanced it, sweet coz," inquired Sir Claude of Mistress Amy, "how chanced it, that our names were so familiarly known at Holycross?"

"Through your own indiscretion in addressing each other during your sojourn at the cottage," replied the young lady, archly smiling. "Ralph, the neatherd, was brother to our little

page; and, long before Lord Cecil returned, had communicated to me, even to the smallest details, your conversation of the morning.—Accident favoured the entrance of your friend into our dwelling; and, in order to get rid of him without discourtesy, stratagem was indispensable. To take my aunt into my confidence I dared not! In spite of the feud existing between her and the elder branch of her house, I feared that the name of Sir Claude Dunbar would hurry her into disclosures that might prove injurious to my father. I knew not that the sentence passed on him in 1715 was on the point of being reversed; and, so scrupulous had I learned to be in all regarding his safety, that I forbore, year after year, to acquaint him with the indigence to which we were reduced by the exactions of our fallen party, lest he should come forward to its assistance."

"A confused sequel to a most perplexed story, my pretty coz!" — cried Sir Claude. "Some winter's evening, you shall instruct us more largely, as we sit in a happy circle, round a blazing fire in the Castle of our forefathers.

Meanwhile, let me bless the stars that presided over our disastrous voyage to Whitehaven: and insured me— since wife she was not to be— a sister, in my mad-brained cousin, Amy."

"No further reminiscences, just now!" ejaculated Cecil, who just then rejoined them from the chapel "All is prepared,—the witnesses are assembled,—and Rawdon stands surpliced at the altar. Unless you wish aunt Maud to faint outright with fatigue, detain them no longer —for Galpin, her page, informs me that his Lady's Eau de Luce was left behind at the last inn they slept in;—and hark! the bells ring out;—the chimes are sounding, the tenants crowding to the door with music and acclamations. They ask to see the bride— they want to catch a glimpse of the enchantress."

"No longer an enchantress, but an humble and happy wife," answered Amy, placing her hand in that of Lord Cecil, while her father approached to conduct her to the altar. "My wand of necromancy is buried for ever, amid the ruins of THE ABBEY!"

XAVIERA.

XAVIERA.

"In Valencia," quoth the Castilian proverb, "flesh is grass, and grass is water; men are women, and women—nothing!"

It was perhaps at the instigation of this disparaging adage, that Don Luis di Junquera, the representative of one of the most ancient houses in the province, saw fit to amend his Valencian meat by the efforts of a Parisian *maître d'hôtel;* and the enervated temperament of his Valencian line, by an alliance with the only daughter of a Neapolitan nobleman, a refugee in Spain from the political troubles agitating his native country. These innovations, however, tended greatly to disturb the

more than *flema Castellana* of his kinsfolk and acquaintance.

The correctness of the proverb was disproved no less by the manly boldness with which Don Luis had outraged Valencian custom, and the tenacity with which he defended his right to be master of his own household, and the carver of his own destinies, than by the vehemence with which his lordship's sudden assumption of independence was resented by a certain Doña Xaviera d'Andujar, the widow of one of his near relatives, who had preconcerted his conjugal subjugation.

Doña Xaviera was decidedly "something!" She was a very beautiful woman, as well as a very audacious manœuvrer; and, but for the fact that she had attained her thirty-eighth year, while the lovely Carolina di Pignatelli was just entering her eighteenth, might have eventually succeeded in establishing her ascendancy over one who, although firmer and more manly in his purpose than accorded with the truth of the Castilian adage, was peculiarly under the domination of female attractions.

One day, however, at the very period when Doña Xaviera considered herself securest of the offer of his hand, and therewithal of the presidency of his magnificent palace in the Gloreta and castle on the Guadalquivir, with their costly hangings, sumptuous marbles, gorgeous plate, and princely caskets of ancestral jewels, it happened that Don Luis was persuaded to accompany her to the convent of the Assumption, fast by the Puerta de los Serranos, in Valencia; where her only child, his ward, was deposited, to be out of the way of her intriguing mother, and in the way of receiving such sprinkling of education as was bestowed upon daughters of hidalgo blood during the last century. Doña Xaviera was anxious to display to the world the paternal interest taken by Don Luis in the welfare of little Doña Florencia; but, unluckily, the self-same grating which secured the little chocolate-complexioned damsel from the corruptions of the city, extended its protection over the maturer beauties of the blooming Carolina, who, at the moment of this ill-timed visit, was receiving the fond greeting of her

father, Prince Pignatelli, on his arrival from a hazardous expedition to his Calabrian estates. Ever bright and joyous, the countenance of the young Neapolitan was so exquisitely irradiated by the rapture of an unexpected reunion with her parent, that Don Luis found it impossible to fix his attention upon the tapestry frame presented him by a lay sister, as a sample of the talents and industry of his future step-daughter. He could see nothing but Carolina's arm thrown around her father's neck; he could listen to nothing but the bland and endearing accents of affection with which she welcomed the old man's arrival.

In vain did Dona Xaviera strive to win his ear by the cajoling tones in which she adjured her dingy little offspring, as, "*Hija de mi alma!*" "Child of my soul!"—her lion-port and awe-commanding grace were not in unison with words of human endearment. It was only the gentle Carolina who knew how to love!

From that period, the destiny of the Valencian lord was determined. If the haughty

widow of Andujar had found her influence insufficient to reform Don Luis's propensity for a foreign household, still less was it available against the heavenly charm of Carolina's eyes; and, in defiance of all obstacles, within two months of their encounter at the grate of the convent, Don Luis had managed to obtain the friendship of the banished Pignatelli, and the hand of his daughter.

His claims upon her heart were perhaps of a more problematical nature; but if, as yet, Carolina had bestowed no more than kindliness and gratitude on the man who had endowed her with a noble name and honourable home, and loaded her father with services at some risk to the reputation of his own loyalty, Dona Xaviera's inference was far from just, that the young Neapolitan was prepared to loathe the shallow egotist she had sworn to honour as her husband.

It is true, the wily widow was, at present, careful to keep this opinion to herself. Having failed in her project to become the wife of Junquera, she still chose to write herself down

his loving kinswoman and ally; and soon began to affect a matronly tenderness towards the bride, and even such airs of duenna-ship as she might have assumed towards a daughter of her own.

Carolina, meanwhile, who had been so early domesticated in Spain as to have become more than half a Valencian in habits and language, accepted the counsels of Junquera's relative as readily as she had already adopted the costume and dialect of his country. Motherless from her cradle, the guardianship of the venerable abbess and sisterhood of the Assumption had sufficed the instinctive cravings of her young heart after womanly companionship and guidance; and she was as ready to adopt Doña Xaviera as a trusty counsellor and friend, as the crafty manœuvrer to proceed against her as an enemy.

When, at the conclusion of the carnival, the hidalgo and his household migrated from their palace in the city to San Felipe, a castle overlooking the beautiful Huerta de Valencia, Carolina earnestly seconded the entreaties of her

lord that his charming relative would deign to bear them company during the summer season; and Doña Xaviera, with seeming reluctance, allowed herself to be persuaded into a project originally planned and suggested by her own intentions.

It was a welcome thing to be the bride, immured as she had been for years and years of childhood, and habituated to no nearer intercourse with nature than could be effected within the narrow limits of the cloister gardens of the Assumption, to find herself for the first time pacing by her husband's side (on a stately Andalusian barb, black as night, unless where a speck or two of foam was seen upon its glossy flank, and with two scarlet pomegranate blossoms stuck gallantly into the head-rein of its silken housings), along the deep ravine forming the channel of the Guadalquivir; or roaming, with his sprightlier kinswoman among the garden grounds skirting the castle of San Felipe, an ancient Moresco fortress of considerable dignity.

Like a wild bird or a honey-bee, Carolina seemed to hover over its fragrant wilderness

of geraniums and jessamines; or reclined beside its tinkling fountains; or mused beneath the shadowy thickets of venerable cork-trees forming the outermost barrier of the domain; —tracing vistas of the valley far far below, whose spreading rice-fields and verdant plantations of mulberry-trees have obtained for Valencia the appellation of the garden of Spain.

Every object around her was new and precious to Carolina. The purple mountains—the sheltered pastures—the inter-tangled woods —the solitary, down-drooping tree—the herds midway in the pool or grouped tranquilly in the shade—the majestic bird winging its flight sea-ward through the skies—the grasshopper singing in the grass—the chaffinch brooding over its nest—the humblest as well as the most imposing shows of nature—each had a voice for her ear, and woke a respondent chord in the sympathy of her young heart. The beauty of the external earth seemed to offer to her lips a fountain of intoxication. She sang—she flew —she laughed her solitary way through the green gardens, as though she had learned to

trifle with the solemnities of her lofty destiny. The joy of gazing unchecked upon the sunshine or the moonlight,—upon flood or forest,—was enough for her happiness; she had attained the consciousness of a sense which had hitherto slumbered in her breast—even that of gratitude to God for his gifts of loveliness unto a world, which his goodness seemed to have adorned for her sake!

Most men would have rejoiced, and even the undemonstrative Conde di Junquera evinced some satisfaction on finding himself the instrument of so much happiness to so gifted a being; for Carolina never looked more beautiful than when she smiled, and now, having overcome the depression of spirits produced by her father's return to Italy soon after her marriage, she was always smiling.

But Doña Xaviera saw things in a different light. *She* had no faith in innocent gaiety; and choosing to interpret the vivacity of the young countess into the indication of a vain and frivolous disposition, was exasperated that the Conde, in deference to the foreign birth of

Carolina, should have been induced to dispense with that second providence of Spanish virtue —the veil and the duenna.

Xaviera was careful, however, not to awaken the vigilance of Don Luis till she could contrive to introduce, as a guest into the castle, a certain Don Juanito d'Albufera, whom she took occasion to present to the notice of its noble owners as a high-born Murcian cavalier, selected by her maternal care to be the future husband of her daughter.

Yet, vast and manifold as were his merits, she admitted her anxiety to exercise some further scrutiny into his character, ere she hazarded the happiness of her child by his solemn betrothment with Doña Florencia; and Don Luis, who felt himself pledged as kinsman and guardian to watch over the welfare of the young lady, could do no less than request that the intended bridegroom might become his inmate for a week or two, during the sojourn of Doña Xaviera under his roof.

Juanito was accordingly welcomed into the domestic circle of San Felipe. He came—he

saw—he even conquered—*not*, indeed, at first sight, the gentle heart of Carolina, but what the wily widow regarded as a first step towards that final consummation—the esteem and predilection of her husband. The young Hidalgo was, in truth, a very taking personage. He possessed all that easy frankness of demeanour to which persons so reserved and formal in their address as Don Luis di Junquera are apt to affix especial value; he was a bold and expert horseman, and consequently a pleasant companion to the lord of the castle; he was an accomplished musician, and therefore a valuable acquisition to the lady. After rising with the lark to follow Don Luis to the chase, he would wake and watch with the nightingale, that he might touch his guitar in accompaniment to the Moorish ballads with which, during the hush of the moonlight hour, Carolina was persuaded to recreate the ears of the Conde and his friends; and Don Luis, who loved to listen to her spirit-stirring recital of the prowess of his ancestors—the defeat of El Chico, and the redemption of the fortress of San Felipe from

the hands of the Moors, was grateful for the aid of a minstrel by whose animated chords her genius seemed to be inspired.

It was impossible, in fact, not to like Juanito. The irresistible openness of his countenance and character, won every heart to his side. But, had he been less prepossessing, Don Luis was not the man to be moved to a paltry feeling of jealousy by the mere beauty of his person, or the mere refinement of his manners. Carolina's bridegroom boasted not a very strong or a very cultivated understanding, but he had high instincts of honour. The countryman of the Cid, he was proud of the distinction; and the generosity of character which sense and enlightenment sometime fail to strengthen or excite, arose in *his* mind from the consciousness of chivalrous descent. He would have been guilty of a sin—of a *crime*—rather than of a base or unworthy action; and suspicion he regarded as mean and degrading. Nor could all Doña Xaviera's hints and insinuations avail to stir up his jealousy of the superior attractions of his young guest; for Don Luis was satisfied

that both his lady and Juanito were come of too gentle blood to be guilty of deceiving a hospitable host or confiding husband.

The widow, meanwhile, shrugging her shoulders at the obtuseness of his perceptions, refrained not from her efforts to render them more susceptible to the fact, that his sable-silvered head was seen to disadvantage by the side of Don Juanito's raven locks, and that the soft cadences of her Florencia's intended bridegroom did not tend to enhance the harsh discords and unpleasing sharps of his own untuneable accents.

She seemed resolved that her refractory kinsman should not be *too* happy in the enjoyment of his cheerful home and the tenderness of his youthful bride; and it was wormwood to her to find her manœuvres obstructed by the more than knightly magnanimity of the high-minded Junquera. Although neither so young nor so handsome as the boyish d'Albufera, he was incapable of stooping to become the puppet of an envious woman's machinations.

Unfortunately, however, Carolina was as

little conscious of enmity on the part of the widow, as of this elevation of soul on the part of her husband. Reared in the seclusion of conventual life, she had not improved her mind by the study of love-romances, printed or acted; had neither "run the gauntlet of a string of puppies" in the ball-room of fashion, nor refined her sentiments by the code of any manual of tender devotion more modern than the ballads of Granada, or the Righte Tragicall Historye of Inez de Castro.

Unprepared, therefore, to espy indications of passion in Albufera's dark eyes, she was equally unobservant of Xaviera's cunning, and of the dignified demeanour of Don Luis; and continued to laugh, and talk, and ride, and run with Juanito,—suffering him to place the pomegranate blossoms in the silken housings of her jet-black jennet, and inviting him to join his voice with hers in the fervent strains of some old madrigal, or the unmeaning sentimentalities of a modern canzonet. She even accepted from him the gift of a dainty silken-eared spaniel, such as seem formed to become the appropriate

watch-dog of a lady's boudoir; diminutive as that wonder of a lap-dog in the fairy tale, which lay concealed within a grain of millet-seed, and originally destined by the gay gallant as a gift of homage to Doña Florencia d'Andujar.

But, although the young hidalgo allowed himself to be confided in by Carolina as a brother and roamed with in the shade, and sported with in the sunshine, he had deeper thoughts and deeper feelings concerning the lady of San Felipe than could have been altogether conned out of his lady mother's book of psalmody, or acquired in the seminarium whence, but a few months before, he had issued forth from studentship to gird on the sword of chivalry.

Whether his motives were brightened by instinct or increased by experience,—stimulated by the pulses of his own heart or the instigations of Doña Xaviera,—it might be difficult to determine; but certain it is, that he began to see in the beautiful Carolina the youthful wife of an elderly lord; open as such, by established precedent (and perhaps accessible), to the persuasive words and more persuasive sighs of any

young and handsome cavalier who might be so lucky as to penetrate into the sanctum of her familiar friendship.

He drew closer to her side, therefore, when they wandered together through the algarobba groves of the Huerta; seized her bridle-rein, when they approached some rugged ascent in the mountainous regions of the Puente de la Viuda, and hung over her with more than fraternal intimacy as they sat together at even-tide, beside the open lattice of her bower window, soothing the summer air with music. And, while the widow calculated upon poisoning the ear of Junquera with hints of his wife's indiscretion, Juanito, on *his* part, to insinuate himself into the better graces of the wife, by attempting to excite her jealousy of Don Luis and the widow.

The first moment he found himself alone with the lady of San Felipe, was sure to elicit his lamentations over the destiny of one who had been tempted to sacrifice herself in marriage to a hoary libertine whose reminiscences of former profligacy were still too strong to admit

of his imbibing the principle of a pure and hallowed affection.

At these condolences, Carolina at first laughed heartily; but when again and again, and circumstantially repeated, she at last grew angry. Her soul was anything but disposed to soften at Juanito's tale of perfidy; she was no less indignant at the imputed treachery of Don Luis, than at the *positive* treachery of the guest who had thought fit to unfold it to her knowledge. Yet it was scarcely possible to remain angry with her young companion. Juanito laughed off the confession of his fault with so good a grace, that she soon forgot to tax him with his scandalous propensities; and the bride, and he who would have been so suitably matched as her bridegroom, became closer and dearer friends than ever.

Such, alas! was the critical epoch selected by Doña Xaviera for a definitive attack upon the credulity of Don Luis di Junquera.

"You profess, I perceive, a somewhat catholic latitude of faith in the virtue of womankind, and the discretion of your charming

Carolina," said she, one evening, when she had drawn him forth to amble by her side along the castle bastions, holding in his hand her fan of peacock's feathers and her comfit-box of cardamums, as became a gallant of his years and breeding;—" and, truly, you are right. It has been observed by all in Valencia on this delicate topic, that when a man so far presumes to outrage the customs of his country, as to unite the pure blood of his race with that of a Neapolitan rebel, he must needs have had especial incentives to so mad an action. The peerlessness of the object preferred, can alone exonerate its rashness."

" Methinks," replied Junquera, caressing his beard, as with dignified gravity he stalked beside her, " methinks, Madam, the excellent merits and attractions of Prince Pignatelli's daughter afford a sufficient apology for my alliance with a stranger of noble blood, even admitting the right of all the old women in Valencia to impugn my liberty of choice."

" The *superficial* attractions of mere youth and beauty," quoth the widow, with a bitter

smile, "are not always accounted, by the opinion of the world, sufficing qualifications in a wife. There *was* a time, my good Lord, when parity of years, parity of station, parity of——"

"There is a time for all things, Madam," interrupted Junquera, in a peevish accent. "When a boy, and trammelled by the prejudices of the narrow circles of that narrow city which you are pleased to call the world, I, too, fancied that the bloom and cheerfulness of youth were secondary in importance to inter-alliance with the more ancient houses of Valencia; for bloom and cheerfulness were then familiar things to my eyes, and in the common course of enjoyment. But I have grown older, Doña Xaviera d'Andujar; and those who were fair and guileless when I was young, have, like myself, become morose, and crafty, and hard of feature; and *now* it is, that, enlightened by their deficiencies, I begin to appreciate the value of loveliness of person and simplicity of mind."

The mortification experienced by the widow at this insolent inuendo, caused the habitual

paleness of her complexion to vary into a green and yellow tint, imitating that of the citron fruits which turned their pale gold ripeness to the sun in the fragrant orangery overlooked by the bastions of San Felipe. Predetermined on vengeance, her malice was now overflowing.

" Far be it from me," she cried, " to plead the cause of age and deformity; which none, my Lord, regard with a more loathing eye than I do. Yet I confess I know no cause why maidenly modesty or matronly purity should be held inconsistent with a smooth cheek, a winning smile, and a waist of comely dimensions. I can even figure to my fancy a lady of San Felipe, a wife for the Conde di Junquera, sufficiently graced in person to satisfy the fastidiousness he affects, yet incapable of soiling the high name with which he has endowed her, by trifling with a handsome stripling—a stranger, the affianced bridegroom of her husband's ward."

" The Holy Trinity be judge over me!"—muttered Don Luis, turning suddenly aside towards the bastions, as if to extend his gaze

over the valley below. "Does the fiend possess this woman?—On what poisonous herb has she trodden?—let not yet her mischief-working tongue, betray me into unbecoming emotion."

"Even now—even at this very moment," resumed Doña Xaviera, "when the birds are carolling their even song among the bushes, and the sunshine streams in mellow splendour athwart the Huerta, and all things in nature are arrayed as if to allure us forth to their enjoyment, does it not please the lady countess to tarry in her chamber, making music, or making grimaces, for the diversion of yonder fanciful boy?—Ay! my Lord, even though I, her guest, her kinswoman, and her elder,—even though *yourself*—her husband, and her elder still, have condescended to solicit her company in our promenade!"

"Twenty legions of fiends repay the creature's malice!" again muttered the Conde, apart. "That I had but strength of mind to stop her short at once!"

"And though such, my dear friend, may be

the unseemly customs of the Sicilies," persisted the Doña, bridling up with self-importance, "*we* old-fashioned wives and mothers of Valencia, are accustomed to look with suspicion on their introduction to our homes and hearths."

"You do wisely," said Don Luis, abruptly. "Should the Lady Florencia my ward for instance, strive to introduce them into *yours*, beware, Madam, beware of the innovation; for from *her*, such innocent freedom of speech were an outrage against the established pruderies of her country. But my Carolina drew breath on a foreign strand; and on *her*, the Spanish ceremonial of the duenna and confessor would sit as unbecomingly, as the basquina and mantilla of an Andalusian on a sculptured goddess of Greece."

"I had ever imagined," insinuated the widow, "that Prince Pignatelli's daughter imbibed her notions of decorum in company with my own daughter, in the Spanish convent of the Assumption, in the Spanish city of Valencia?"

that both his lady and Juanito were come of too gentle blood to be guilty of deceiving a hospitable host or confiding husband.

The widow, meanwhile, shrugging her shoulders at the obtuseness of his perceptions, refrained not from her efforts to render them more susceptible to the fact, that his sable-silvered head was seen to disadvantage by the side of Don Juanito's raven locks, and that the soft cadences of her Florencia's intended bridegroom did not tend to enhance the harsh discords and unpleasing sharps of his own untuneable accents.

She seemed resolved that her refractory kinsman should not be *too* happy in the enjoyment of his cheerful home and the tenderness of his youthful bride; and it was wormwood to her to find her manœuvres obstructed by the more than knightly magnanimity of the high-minded Junquera. Although neither so young nor so handsome as the boyish d'Albufera, he was incapable of stooping to become the puppet of an envious woman's machinations.

Unfortunately, however, Carolina was as

the key of a certain private garden—the pavilion-garden of the castle—which has been made the little instrument of mighty evil."

"That very key," observed Don Luis, musing, "did I myself present to Carolina on her arrival at San Felipe, to secure to her a tranquil and unmolested haunt, and, when I asked it of her this morning, with the view of exhibiting the frescoes of the pavilion to—to—to——"

"*Juanito,*" said the lady stoutly.

"Even so,—to Don Juanito d'Albufera, that very key, did my wife protest was no longer in her possession."

"She may have spoken truly;—it might at that moment have been in *his.*"

"And ingenuously laying the blame on her own carelessness," continued Junquera, without adverting to the lady's inuendo, "she admitted that she had lost it from her chamber!"

"What matter where or on whom *she* laid the blame?" cried Doña Xaviera, impatiently; "'tis where yourself, Don Luis di Junquera, shall be pleased to affix it, that the stain will

rest. Nevertheless, *I* would be the last to influence your counsels. See with your own eyes, hear with your own ears, and exhort or condemn with your own lips. This evening, so please you, we will watch together in the plantations leading to the pavilion, and then——"

"Play the spy upon my wife—degrade myself into an eaves-dropping lacquey?"—cried the Don, well content to have found a pretext for the explosion of the wrath already boiling in his bosom. "I—I, who have proved my superiority to the vulgar foibles of matrimonial life, by bestowing on my Carolina the freedom of action enjoyed by the wives of other countries? — Better call back at once the duenna and the veil, and render myself a laughing-stock to all the prudes and viragos of Valencia!"

"As you will!"—replied his companion, drawing up with assumed dignity. "But permit me to doubt whether the charming Doña Carolina di Junquera will leave it a matter of your *choice* to become a laughing-stock to the

world. The distinction may chance to have been already and amply conferred!"

So saying, and having at that moment reached the portal, Doña Xaviera, as she claimed back the *abanico* from his hands, courtesied with mock respect to the ground, and glided through the open wicket; leaving to the unfortunate husband, the alternative of ending his perplexities by accepting her counsels, or by a leap from the fearful northern rampart of the Castle overlooking the rocks of San Miguel de los Reyes.

"Fool and wretch that I am!"—murmured he within the troubled depths of his soul;—"*fool*, for having given scope to the possibility of such mischiefs as this she-demon announces; *wretch*, for wanting courage to clear up my misgivings, or confirm the sentence of my despair!—Meet him by twilight—moonlight—midnight—(how said she?)—in the solitude of the pavilion garden? Carolina!—my wife—*mine!* Oh! that yesterday were but come again; that I could be asleep and wake,

confirmed in reliance on her excellence, as before this boy's arrival—that I could but look once more into her face, and hold it, as at first, the mirror of every earthly—heavenly virtue!—I, who so trusted her—who gave my honour into her keeping, without so much as an apprehension of being forced, even in jest, to call it back for scrutiny!—Meet him by night, in the Pavilion garden!—to what end?—does she not see him every hour of the day? Has he not the *entrée* of her oriel chamber, unchecked, unwatched?—Ay, ay!—but *there* my dainty lady is subjected to importunate visits;—there, this boy — this stripling—this damned, damned lover-minion—may be obstructed in his homage by the intrusion of a jealous husband or officious waiting-maid. And they must needs appropriate to themselves the pure retreat I had devoted to her secret meditations—her solitary delight!—Faugh!—I cannot breathe this evening—a heavy storm seems brooding in the air!—How fearfully still is everything around me!—Yet the strangest tumults are ringing in my ears, and my breast

is loaded with oppression. Carolina?—Juanito? —Oh! that it were—that it were with me but as yesterday!——"

But, as he gradually drew towards the Castle, calmer thoughts possessed themselves of the mind of Junquera; and the high self-reliance of a noble nature returned with double force.

"I will visit her chamber," said he firmly, as he set foot upon the private stair leading to Carolina's apartments—"I will question her with frankness, as husband to wife, even as I could wish that she would deal with me in return. She so loved her old father—she so loves and venerates him still—that I will not believe she can have stooped to that which would lay his gray hairs with sorrow in the grave!"

And thus, taking counsel of his better self, he ascended slowly towards the private entrance especially devoted to his use in Carolina's apartments, which having gently opened —oh, grief!—oh, consternation!—he found the arras' hangings discreetly drawn over the door as during the chilly autumn evenings, so

as to screen the persons within from sudden interruption!

It had been but the work of a second to tear aside the tapestry, and at once unveil the offenders; but, as Don Luis raised his hand for that purpose, the voice of Albufera modulated to tones of the tenderest intercession suspended his movements. At that critical moment, the cry of honour was stifled in the breast of Junquera, and his hand involuntarily clenching the hilt of his rapier, revealed his determination to play the spy—to hear and revenge all—to become a listener, perchance a *murderer!*

"Believe it not as you list," were the first words uttered by the unlucky Juanito—(and Don Luis could not but figure to himself, as he stood with his limbs convulsively pressed against the threshold, the blooming cheek of his Carolina fanned by the perfidious breath that gave them utterance)—"but 'tis as certain as the truth of Heaven, that a league somewhat more tender than of amity, subsists between Doña Xaviera d'Andujar, and your respected

lord. Disposed though we may be to interpret favourably of the conduct of both, I am bound to declare that I have seen nods, and winks, smiles, passing after a most unseemly fashion between my future mother-in-law and her daughter's guardian."

"It may be so—it may be so—it may—it may be so!" said, or rather sang, the gay-hearted Carolina, lightly touching the strings of her guitar as if in accompaniment to her giddy affirmation—"and why not, I pray you?—Junquera is Doña Xaviera's near kinsman, and was her husband's friend; and there may be private matters of business stirring between them, which it little imports us to know."

"And can you content yourself," exclaimed Albufera in a still closer whisper—a whisper that caused the ardent blood of Don Luis to scorch his very veins—"that he whom you profess to love should withdraw his gaze from your lovely countenance — (a countenance whose merest smile is worth the Indies!)—

to fix it on the meretricious graces of a withered coquette? — 'Tis on Doña Xaviera that the eyes of Junquera are riveted—'tis to *her* his compliments are addressed—'tis——"

"And would you have him then Hidalgo, as he is," interrupted Carolina, somewhat moved, "inflict his caresses in public upon his wife, like some water-carrier or melon-vender of the street-corners of Valencia?—Look you, Don Juanito! this arraigning of my husband's conduct, is, on your part, but a graceless effort. Don Luis di Junquera is indeed my elder in years. I knew it when we wedded, and was not daunted by the fact; I know it now, and the knowledge serves only to mingle some shade of reverence with my attachment. I love him, Juanito,—I honour him—as those alone deserve to be loved and honoured who know how to show love and honour in return. And, if at times I am moved to regard his measures as mysterious or of ill account, I have but to look down yonder on the olive groves of the Huerta, and mark how dim and dark the aspect of their foliage, till the breeze, wafting

aside the leaves, reveals their silver lining to the day.—So it is with the character of Junquera!"

"Bah!" interrupted Albufera, while unconsciously the heaving breast of Don Luis drew calmer breath, and his hand released its clutch of the pommel of his sword—"*this* is the mere language of romance!—But facts are stubborn things:—and, when I show you this key, which I have managed to coax out of Doña Xaviera, *this* key, which by her own admission has long afforded her means of secret interviews with the Conde, and which, I, dearest, loveliest Carolina, humbly trust to render the protecting talisman of mutual happiness between us, more blest than ever fell to the lot of mortal man——"

"That key is *mine!*" interrupted Carolina, eagerly snatching it from his hand. "It must have come into the possession of our kinswoman by treachery; but not by the treachery of my husband, for Junquera is incapable of an unworthy thought or action. Since Doña Xaviera became our guest (unwilling to admit

into a spot rendered sacred by happiest and holiest reminiscences) I have neglected the Pavilion garden, and noted not that the key, for some invidious purpose, had been withdrawn from my chamber. But now I bid you restore it, my Lord!—Yes!—I bid you restore it with the authority of one who, insulted by your evil designs, has a right to assume so much command over your proceedings. Give me the key, then, and quit this place for ever! We have been happy companions together, but I was deceived in you, Don Juanito!—and thrice deceived in the mother of Doña Florencia d'Andujar. No more, Sir!—Repair, at least, the injury you have done, by departing from San Felipe without compelling me to acquaint my husband how greatly we had misplaced our trust:—I would willingly spare him the pain of the discovery!—God forgive you, my Lord—God forgive you!—and save us in future from such false friends!"

"I obey you," replied the young Hidalgo, in a subdued tone; for in a moment he saw that the indignation of the lovely lady was

genuine and undissembled. "With a heavy heart, I quit your presence; but believe me at least when I swear on my life, my soul, my honour, that I am guiltless of all participation in the plots of Doña Xaviera;—guiltless, dearest, sweetest Carolina, of all but adoring you!"

The sound of a heavy weight falling on the chamber, reduced his protestations to silence. Don Luis di Junquera, overcome by the emotions contending in his bosom—by the sense of shame at his own position as a spy—of indignation at the perfidy of his kinswoman,—and, above all, of triumph in the noble excellence of his wife—had fallen into a deep swoon. Ere he recovered perfect consciousness, Doña Xaviera and her *protégé*, apprised that their misdemeanours were brought to light, had discreetly taken their way back to Valencia, without waiting for the ceremony of a farewell interview.

Six years afterwards, when Don Luis di Junquera was gathered to his Gothic forefathers, it was to his widow he bequeathed the

vast inheritance of his fortune and estates; and it is recorded in the scandalous chronicles of Valencia, that five years afterwards, the fair Carolina was moved to share them with—Don Juanito d'Albufera.

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